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# The pilgrimage to Elvis Presley's Graceland: A study of the meanings of place

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THE PILGRIMAGE TO ELVIS PRESLEY'S GRACELAND:

A STUDY OF THE MEANINGS OF PLACE

BY

JAMES W. DAVIDSON

Bachelor of Arts Degree, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1983

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Geography  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts Degree  
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1985

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THE PILGRIMAGE TO ELVIS PRESLEY'S GRACELAND:  
A STUDY OF THE MEANINGS OF PLACE

BY JAMES W. DAVIDSON

ABSTRACT

Sites become places when people bestow meaning, such as sanctity, upon them. Throughout human history, sacred places have continually emerged within cultural groups. Sacred places commonly focus on heroic figures. A pilgrimage is the visible expression of the sanctity of a place. This thesis examines the motives, meanings and experiences which are associated with the journey to Elvis Presley's Graceland mansion and grave in Memphis, Tennessee.

Data came from questioning 209 people visiting Presley's home in the summer of 1984, from fan clubs around the world, and from personal interviews with key figures in Memphis. In my analysis of the data, I searched for the essence of the Memphis experience. The kinds of answers gave more insight than did the numbers of people giving them.

The field material gathered in Memphis was very rich in detail and laden with emotion. It revealed the similarities and differences between two groups of visitors: pilgrims and tourists. Whereas both groups admired Presley, the meanings they bestowed upon him and the places in his life varied greatly. Tourists tended to be passive observers in a sterile setting; pilgrims found a tremendous vitality in that same environment.

Expectations which travelers have of their destination's aesthetic qualities are not related to the meanings which they assign to that place. One's perceptions of the heroic figure influences the meaning of place, and in turn the assigned significance of place affects one's environmental experiences there. The pilgrimage in popular culture is not likely to be a passing fad, because it fulfills a human need.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

When Elvis Presley died on 16 August 1977, eighty thousand people gathered at the gates of his Graceland mansion, in Memphis, Tennessee. A few thousand of the mourners were allowed a short glimpse of the body, as it lay in state, in the front hall of the mansion (Brixey and Dixon 1983, 58). The public's response to the singer's passing was unprecedented (Gregory and Gregory 1982, 168). People throughout the world were shocked and saddened upon hearing the news. Five months later, ten thousand Presley fans arrived in Memphis to mark his forty-third birthday; on 8 January (New York Times 9 January 1978; p. 16). Likewise, on the first anniversary of Presley's death, nine thousand people from the United States, Canada, Europe and Japan filled all of the hotel rooms in the city (New York Times 12 August 1978, p. 64). City officials speculated that many people were discouraged from visiting Memphis at that time because of a police strike (New York Times 14 August 1978, p. 27). On 7 June 1982, the interior of Graceland was opened to the public for the very first time. During its first six months of operation, 280,000 people toured the mansion (Memphis Tourist Reporter 2 August 1984, p. 8). This was a ten percent increase upon an already considerable flow of visitors (Shelby County Government 1983, 5). Only five percent of the patrons were from Memphis and its surrounding region (Dixon 1985).

Although Presley's home and grave site are visited throughout

the year, devoted followers tend to congregate in those places particularly on the singer's birthday and on the anniversary of his death (Brixey 1984). Their activities in Memphis and their motives for these visits are in accordance with the notion of pilgrimage; it is the purpose of this thesis to describe and discuss them in such a context. My focus is upon the pilgrims' views and the satisfactions derived from the pilgrimage. I am well aware of the commercialization of the Presley-Memphis phenomenon. Moneymaking industries are present in almost all pilgrimages, religious as well as secular, to natural sites as much as to places which are associated with media heroes (Bharati 1963, 137; Gross 1971, 142; Heath 1971, 44; Sumption 1975, 256). This paper will point out that Presley and Graceland are much more than the products of big business. A significant number of people have very deep emotional bonds with this famous figure and the house in which he lived.

To understand the complexities of the Presley-Memphis phenomenon, several issues are investigated. Primary consideration is given to the pilgrims' motives for embarking on the journey to Memphis. Building upon these explanations, I then examine the appeal of Elvis Presley to his devout followers. Next, I probe the meanings which they assign to his home and grave site. Their experiences in these sacred spaces, and the satisfactions they derive from actually being there, are also reflected upon. Fifth, to what extent do the devotees have similar feelings toward other sites in Memphis which are in some way linked with the late singer? Sixth, how do they

interact with one another, as well as with their surroundings?

Seventh, does reality concur with their expectations of the Presley mansion? Next, to identify the dimensions of the pilgrimage, comparisons are made between the devotees, tourists, and people who knew the singer personally. Finally, I compare the visitors in terms of their age, sex, occupation and place of origin.

### Justification

Why is the Presley-Memphis phenomenon a relevant topic for geographical inquiry? Because the idolization of Elvis Presley involves the movement of large numbers of people to one particular point in space -- Memphis, Tennessee; because such a pilgrimage involves motives and satisfactions which are not basically economic (Nolan 1983, 421); because the Presley subculture has played an integral role in shaping Memphis as a place (Tanaka 1977, xxi, 2); and because this is a prime example of environmental perception (Ford 1984, 146-47).

It may be useful to note that when I speak of perception I mean that the individual's mind processes and assigns meaning to stimuli (Steele 1981, 21). I use the term in a less restricted sense than psychologists may do.

The purpose of this study is not to provide a definitive explanation of hero worship, but rather to describe how it can give meaning to place.

[In geography,] man is not studied in himself and for himself, but in relationship to his environment, to his social groupings, and to the outward signs of his activities (Beaujeau-Garnier 1976, 8).

Two paradigms of perception research in geography form the foundation of the present study: cognitive and experiential (Sell, Taylor and Zube 1984, 65). The cognitive paradigm postulates that the aesthetic aspects of the environment are determined in the mind of the observer. The experiential paradigm theorizes that a landscape's attractiveness is a function of its inherent qualities and of the meanings which people bestow upon that particular setting.

Empirical studies have tended to focus on people's perceptions of their surroundings, and have largely ignored the satisfactions which they derive from being in a particular setting (Sell, Taylor and Zube 1984, 68). Likewise, research on historic preservation has concentrated on architectural concerns, rather than on sense of place (Datel and Dingemans 1984, 138). Finally, little is known about pilgrims' experiences (Birks 1974, 297). The present study was undertaken to help to fill these voids in the literature.

The Presley-Memphis phenomenon highlights the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research. Relph (1976b, Preface) states,

Place and sense of place do not lend themselves to scientific analysis for they are inextricably bound up with all the hopes, frustrations, and confusions of life, and possibly because of this social scientists have avoided these topics.

Similarly, Seamon (1984, 175), Slater (1977, 41), and Stewart and

Mickunas (1974, 25) state that ordinary scientific methods have difficulty working with such hard-to-measure considerations. An alternative approach is phenomenological. Tuan (1971, 181) states, "Phenomenology is concerned with essences: what, for example is the essence of man, space or experience?" Because a phenomenological approach may be unstructured, it frees the researcher to probe human thoughts, beliefs, values, expectations and the like (Stewart and Mickunas 1974, 3-4). True, tallies can be made of the number of people who hold a certain belief. However, intellectual inquiry is not mechanical. It involves a great deal of thought and insight. Tuan (1971, 181) comments,

4. "geography is organized knowledge of the earth as the world of man."...the root meaning of "world" (wer) is in fact man; to know the world is to know oneself.

How can we truly understand ourselves if we do not look at the complexities of daily interactions with each other and with our surroundings? And, conversely, how can we understand the importance of places if we ignore our human emotions?

#### Elvis Presley

Who was this person whose home became a late twentieth century mecca? During the mid 1950s, Elvis Presley emerged as the primary catalyst of rock'n'roll music. His energetic performances on stage, television and phonograph records captured the attention of young

people throughout the world. Members of the adult population saw him as a bad influence on their children because of his blatant sexuality and Negro vocal qualities. They were afraid that he would encourage promiscuity and racial equality. Because of these criticisms, Presley was not allowed to perform in some major centers such as Jersey City and Montreal. In his third appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" in January 1957, television viewers were only able to see his head and upper torso, for similar reasons. The following year he was drafted into the army for two years of service. When he returned to public life in March 1960, he was much more subdued and was hailed by the United States Government as a model soldier. By the dawn of the 1970s, Elvis Presley had become a symbol of everything that was good about America. He was at that time probably the most photographed human being in history, and could be identified throughout the world by his first name alone (Lichter 1978, Marsh 1982).

Elvis had very humble beginnings. He was born in a tiny shack in Tupelo, Mississippi, on 8 January 1935. His twin brother, Jesse Garon, was stillborn. When Elvis was thirteen years old, he moved to Memphis with his parents, Vernon and Gladys Presley. In Memphis, the Presleys were unable to raise themselves from a life of poverty. Upon his graduation from Humes High School in June 1953, Elvis Presley was employed by the Crown Electric Company as a truck driver and warehouseman. He remained working there until he achieved some success in show business (Marsh 1982).

Presley's life began to change during his first summer after leaving high school. In August or September, he paid \$4.00 to record "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin" at the Memphis Recording Service, a department of Sun Studios. Because Elvis impressed the owner, Sam Phillips, he was able to make his first commercial recording, "That's All Right Mama," in July 1954. The following year, Phillips sold Presley's recording contract to RCA Victor for the unprecedented sum of \$35,000. On 28 January 1956, he made his national television debut on "Stage Show," which was hosted by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey. Over the next twelve months, Elvis made a total of eleven scheduled appearances on television with the Dorseys, Milton Berle, Steve Allen and Ed Sullivan. For the remainder of his illustrious career, he chose to appear in front of television cameras on only four other occasions. These were in 1960, 1968, 1973 and 1977. Another facet of Elvis's success story was motion pictures. Between 1956 and 1972, he made thirty-three feature length films. By the end of the 1960s, the entertainer became disenchanted with Hollywood because his roles lacked substance. In 1969, Elvis Presley made a triumphant return to live performing after an absence of eight years. He broke attendance records in Las Vegas show rooms and in stadiums throughout the United States. In 1971, the Jaycees officially recognized his overall contribution to American society. Although the singer was enormously popular throughout the world, he never acted upon his dream to play in foreign countries, for reasons which are still unknown (Harbinson 1975, Lichter 1978, Marsh 1982).



Although Presley was often obese during his latter years, and he was rumored to engage in bizarre behavior and to have an addiction to prescription drugs, he never lost the affection of his followers (Marsh 1982). Elvis Presley died at the age of forty-two on the second floor of his home in Memphis.

#### Graceland

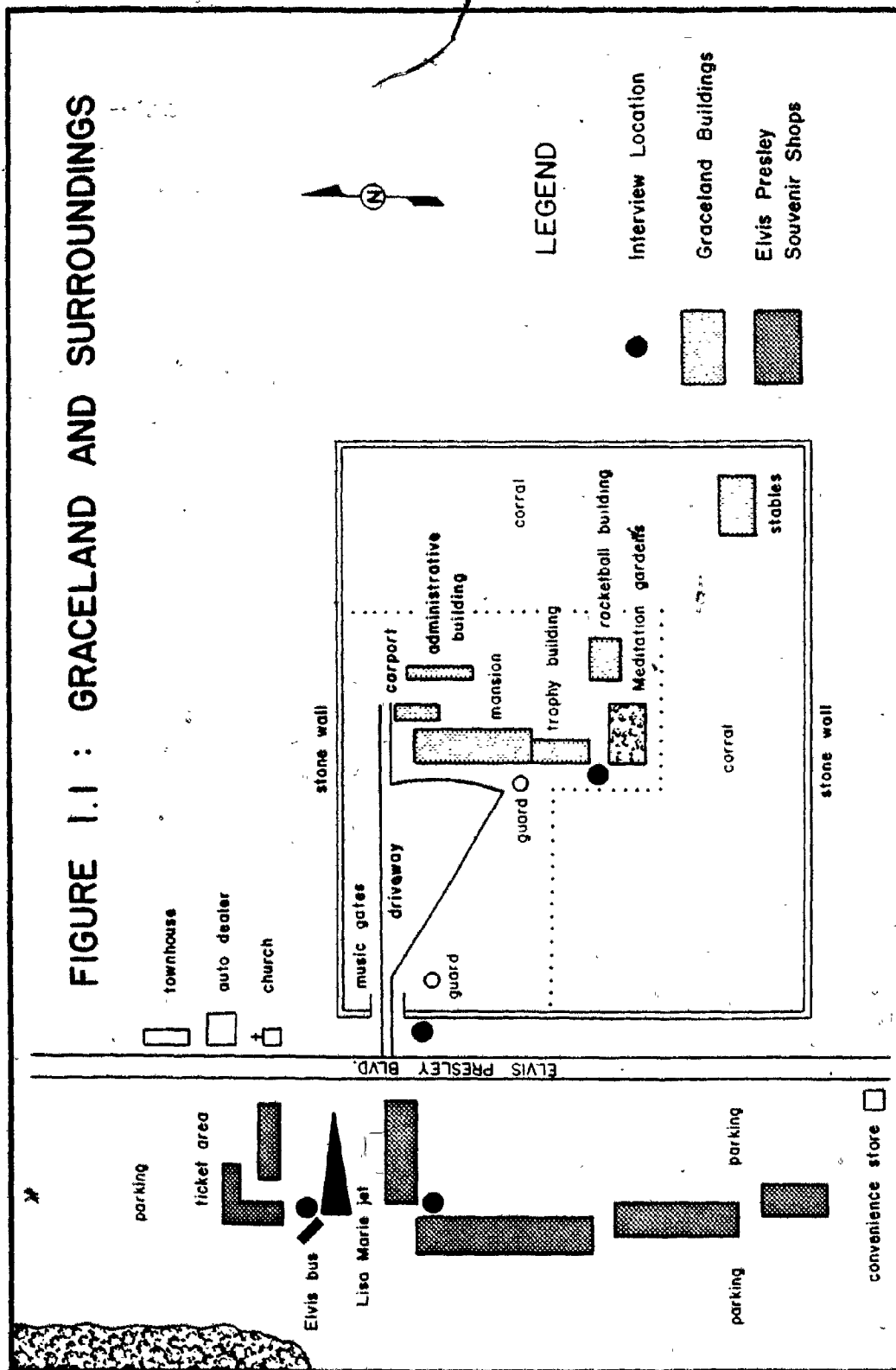
Graceland, located at 3764 Elvis Presley Boulevard, was Elvis Presley's primary home for twenty years (Figure 1.1). Elvis loved Graceland. He often said, "I feel I belong here" (Graceland Enterprises 1982). Although the mansion's very name connotes special meaning, that appellation has rather simple origins. The 13.8 acre property was originally owned by Mr. S.E. Toof, founder of a printing company in Memphis. Toof's daughter, Grace, inherited the land, which was subsequently dubbed "Grace's Land" or "Graceland" by the local people. Miss Toof's niece, Ruth Brown Moore, built the twenty-three room house in 1939 with her husband, Dr. Thomas Moore. Elvis purchased Graceland in 1957 from Mrs. Moore for the sum of \$100,000 (Roberts 1982a, 5). He retained its original name because it reflected the home's tranquility (Presley 1984). Graceland was declared an historic site by the Tennessee Historical Commission, on 16 August 1982. A plaque was erected on Elvis Presley Boulevard by the International Federation of Elvis Presley Fan Clubs.

Elvis Presley's remains were interred at Graceland, in an area

**FIGURE 1.1 : GRACELAND AND SURROUNDINGS**

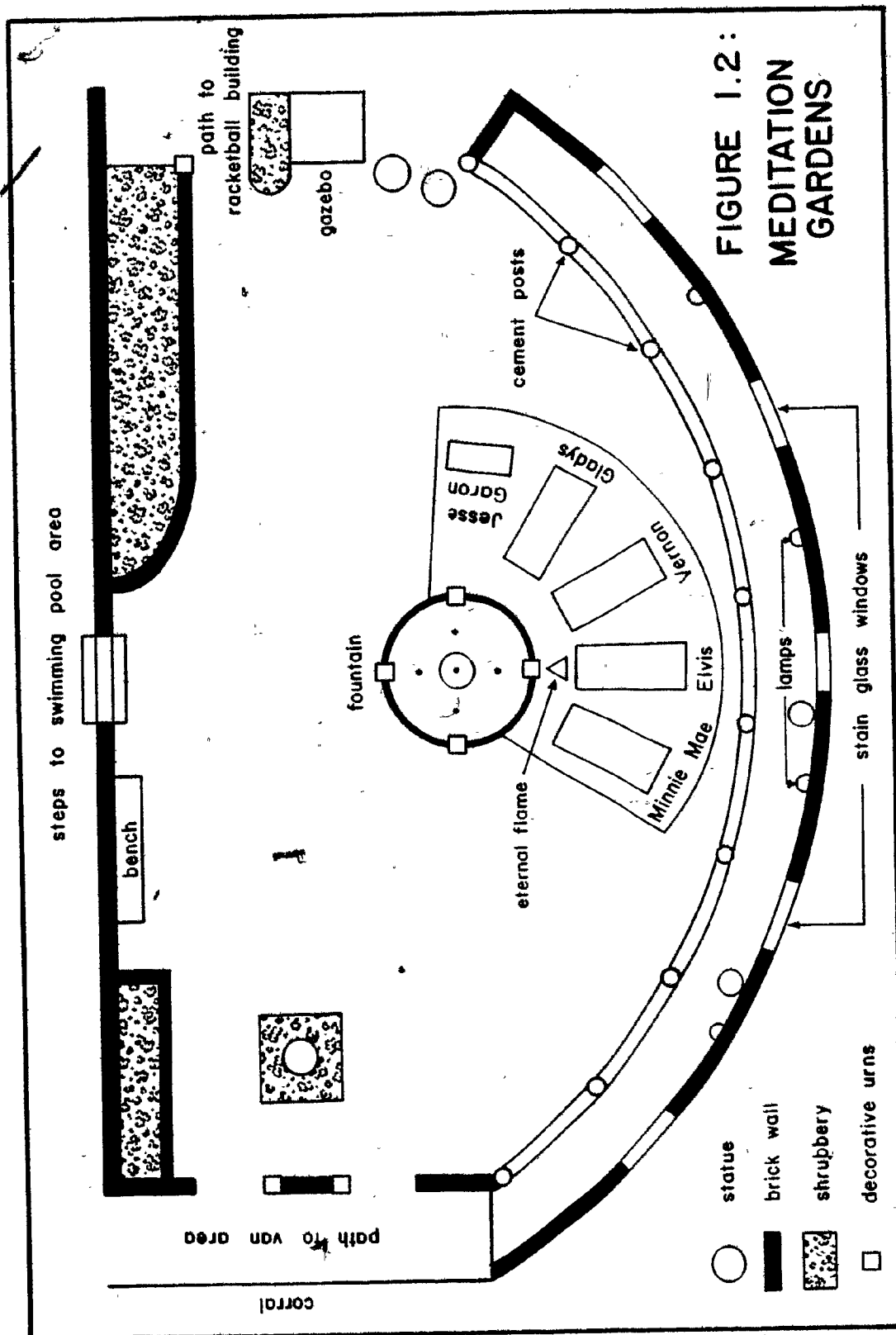
The map illustrates the layout of Graceland and its immediate surroundings. Key features include:

- Surroundings:** A parking area, ticket area, and convenience store are located to the left of the main property. A bus stop for the "Elvis bus" and a "Lisa Marie jet" are also indicated.
- Graceland Property:** The property is enclosed by a stone wall. Inside, there is a driveway leading to a "music gates" area. The main building is the "mansion", surrounded by a "corral". Other buildings include the "administrative building", "trophy building", "rocketball building", and "Meditation gardens". A "guard" post is located near the driveway.
- Legend:** The legend identifies symbols for "townhouse", "auto dealer", "church", "interview location" (a black dot), "Graceland Buildings" (a white rectangle), "Elvis Presley" (a black dot), and "souvenir shops" (a shaded rectangle).
- North Arrow:** A north arrow is located in the upper right corner of the map.



known as Meditation Gardens, on 2 October 1977 (Figure 1.1). During his lifetime, he often sat in Meditation Gardens in quiet contemplation (Brikey and Dixon 1983, 50). At the time of his death, the singer's body was originally entombed in a mausoleum at Forest Hill Cemetery, five kilometers north of the mansion, on Elvis Presley Boulevard. The reburial was done for two reasons. First, Elvis fans disrupted the serenity of the graveyard by their vast numbers and by removing greenery for mementos. Second, the corpse was in danger of being stolen from its initial resting place. Gladys Presley's body was also moved to Meditation Gardens on the same day. She died in 1958 (Worth and Tamerius 1981, 129). In 1979, Vernon Presley passed away and was laid to rest between his wife and son. The following year, Elvis's paternal grandmother, Minnie Mae Presley, died and was buried beside her famous grandson. Bronze plaques mark each of the graves (Figure 1.2). An eternal flame was erected at the head of Elvis's grave by several of his friends. Finally, a small marker was placed in memory of the singer's twin brother. His remains could not be located (Smith 1984).

Graceland ranks with the Mississippi River as the city's busiest tourist attractions. There is no clear indication about which of these sites is visited more often (Shelby County Government 1983, 5). Admission prices, in 1984, for the one hour tour of the Presley mansion were: adults \$6.50, children three to twelve years \$4.50, and toddlers free. Visitors are shuttled onto the property by minibuses. When they disembark near the front entrance of the home,



they are greeted by the first of several tour guides. Patrons are told that Vernon Presley's sister, Delta Mae Biggs is still residing there. They are also informed that the mansion is being held in trust for Elvis's daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, until she reaches the age of twenty-five in 1993. At that time, she will have several options regarding the mansion, including the cessation of the tours.

Once the visitors enter the home, they are guided into the dining room. They are told that Elvis sat at the head of the table, and that dinner was served in the Presley household around 10:00 P.M. Next, the visitors step back through the front hall into the living room. Its custom-built sofa and coffee table are highlighted. In the background they can see a ten foot, gold leaf piano sitting in the music room. The colour scheme on the ground floor was changed from red to blue and white, in preparation for the tours, by the singer's ex-wife, Priscilla Presley. She wanted the home to be representative of the twenty years that Elvis resided there (Brixey 1984). The tour group is then led downstairs to the TV room. The three built-in television sets were inspired by President Lyndon Johnson, who liked to watch three news programs simultaneously. Elvis enjoyed watching three football games. Following this, the visitors move to the pool room, where they see hundreds of yards of pleated material on the walls and ceiling. They are informed that the billiard table was torn by one of the singer's friends who failed to make a trick shot. Next, they ascend a back staircase into The Jungle Room, a den which Presley decorated in only a few hours. This

room was the scene of a recording session in 1976 which produced the following albums: "From Elvis Presley Boulevard Memphis, Tennessee" and "Moody Blue." Visitors are not allowed upstairs for two reasons. First, the Presley family wants to maintain the privacy of the singer's private quarters. Second, building inspectors caution that the staircase could not withstand heavy traffic flows unless substantial alterations were made.

The remainder of the tour is conducted outside and in some of the auxiliary buildings (Figure 1.1). The carport displays Gladys Presley's pink Cadillac and a sample of Elvis's private motor vehicles including a 1975 Ferrari, two Stutz, and tri-wheeled motorcycles. Visitors are allowed to sit on a modified snowmobile and in a pink jeep which was used in the 1962 movie, "Blue Hawaii." Next, the trophy building chronicles the entertainer's private life and career. One highlight is a stack of thousands of petitions which the United States Government received from disgruntled Presley fans after their hero was sent his draft notice. Gold records, stage costumes, gifts from fans, firearms and police badges are also on display. The visitors then leave the trophy building and file by the swimming pool to the racketball building, in which a ten minute film is shown. Horses often stand just outside the exit door of the racketball building and attract considerable attention. Finally, the visitors spend time in Meditation Gardens before boarding the shuttle buses at their own leisure.

Across the street from Graceland, at 3717 Elvis Presley

Boulevard, is the assembly area for the mansion tours (Figure 1.1). Two of the singer's larger vehicles are on display there. One of these is a 1959 Flexible VL coach, which people can tour for \$1.00. The other is a Convair 880 jet aircraft, the Lisa Marie. The admission price for the airplane was \$3.50 in 1984. In addition, there are seventeen establishments which sell Presley souvenirs, as well as fast-food.

Such are the basic aspects of a visit to Graceland. Thus far, I have not mentioned anything on the meaning of a Graceland visit, on what Tuan (1978c, 363) calls "the felt quality of the human world." But how does one determine the meaning and feeling of a place? Primarily by asking the persons involved, and so the next chapter considers how my information was obtained. The questions asked, however, reflect certain expectations based on previous work and theory, and so the two subsequent chapters review the literature on pilgrimage and hero worship and on meaning and experience of place. The next to the last chapter presents my findings, which are then compared with the literature in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### PROCEDURE

In the preceding chapter, we saw that the purpose of this paper is to probe into the Memphis experience. The present chapter chronicles each step of the investigation.

#### Assumptions

At the outset I made some basic assumptions. Let us consider each of these.

One assumption was that the pilgrimage to Memphis is regarded by the Presley faithful as the ultimate form of adulation of their hero. The reasoning behind this, was that Graceland was not only Elvis Presley's home for twenty years, it was also his chosen refuge from the pressures of public life. The status of a hero is derived in part from the distance between the leader and his followers (Klapp 1949, 60-61). Because Graceland served as a barricade between Elvis and his fans as well as being his favorite place, it seemed reasonable to assume that the mansion holds a special place in the hearts of Presley fans.

A second assumption was that the pilgrimage to Memphis is regarded as a status symbol among Elvis Presley followers. Followers gain status by coming into contact with their leader in some manner, as in the case of Frank Sinatra's fans, who gained prestige by seeing



him, touching him or acquiring intimate souvenirs (Turner and Killian, 1972, 388). Because Elvis, the man, is no longer accessible, it was postulated that his possessions act as surrogates. That is, Presley fans gain prestige by experiencing 'the real Elvis' rather than countless reproductions. An analogy can be drawn between the Memphis phenomenon and religious experiences. Donovan (1979, 1) states that for those people who most value religion, a personal experience with a god is of ultimate importance. Presley fans, therefore, may feel that they have not experienced the ultimate until they have been to Memphis.

The third assumption was that the attractiveness of Memphis is due in part to the opportunities which that city provides for ritualistic adulation. Tanaka (1977) states that one of the significant aspects of pilgrimage centers is the various ritualistic activities performed by the pilgrims. Memphis provides many forms of ritualistic adulation including memorial services and candlelight vigils.

The final assumption was that people are drawn to Memphis because they are able to come in contact with others who are equally committed to Presley. The pilgrimage to Mecca is a predominant aspect of Islamic culture because it facilitates a feeling of brotherhood (Rowley and El-Hamden 1977, 753).

Qualitative research is inductive. That is, the researcher does not formulate specific hypotheses before data collection (Patton, 1980, 40-41). My assumptions were not generated to be proven or

disproven, but rather to give my investigation some direction.

I assumed that the role and time required to gather statistical evidence for a few statements would preclude my gathering data on the tissue and fabric of...life (Goffman 1961, x).

#### Data Collection

I utilized various sources of information in the preparation of this investigation: newspaper articles, books, periodicals, questionnaires, and telephone and personal interviews. Because of the nature of the subject matter, I supplemented the geographical literature with references from other branches of the social sciences, including psychology, sociology and religious studies. Several books and articles were utilized in order to obtain insights into the geographical and motivational aspects of pilgrimages. I referred to such works as Buttner (1980b), Lynch (1960), Relph (1976b) and Tuan (1975b) to gain insight into environmental perception and the meaning of place. One study, Prisoners of Space? Exploring the Geographical Experience of Older People by Rowles (1978a) was particularly useful. To gain knowledge of human thought processes and experiences, I investigated phenomenology and existentialism. Hero worship and charisma also received some attention because a basic aspect of the Memphis allurements is an individual, Elvis Presley. Newspaper articles and periodicals disclosed the continued impacts of the deaths of other heroes such as John F. Kennedy and Buddy Holly. Other useful information was

obtained by reading the theoretical foundations of religion as presented by Durkheim (1965), Eliade (1957), Freud (1964) and Weber (1968). A final area of investigation looked at works such as Budd and Ruben (1979) which consider the influence of the mass media in the shaping of public opinion.

The next logical step was to examine people's attitudes towards the Presley image. I accessed the comments of Elvis Presley fans made during the last fifteen years from two feature length Presley documentaries, "Elvis: That's the Way It Is!" (1970) and "Elvis on Tour" (1972), as well as from the television special, "Elvis In Concert" (1977). All of these films contain footage of Presley fans talking about their hero during his lifetime. A fourth movie, "This is Elvis," produced and directed by Andrew Solt and Malcolm Leo in 1981 for Warner Brothers, presents rare footage of Presley's earliest fans and news coverage of the public's response to the singer's death. Although these sources of information were extremely useful in pointing out the diversity of interpretations of Elvis among his followers, they were sterile in the sense that I could not pose further questions to the respondents. So I contacted people with an interest in Presley through fan club publications and later through a five week study in Memphis.

In February 1984, I conducted an indepth telephone interview with Fran Roberts, president of the Elvis in Canada fan club. We discussed why people travel to Memphis, the meanings they place on the pilgrimage, and the degree of posthumous adulation of Presley.

Subsequent conversations were held at her Hamilton, Ontario, home in June 1984, and in Memphis in August of that year.

To explore the universality of the various statements made by Mrs. Roberts, I prepared a short list of open-ended questions which were sent to fan club presidents throughout the world in March 1984 (Appendix I). One third of the questionnaires were returned. I obtained responses from England, Germany, Australia and the United States, but none from Italy or the Orient. Robert Job, president of the New Jersey State Association for Elvis Presley was asked to make additional comments in a personal interview conducted in Memphis in August 1984.

Contacts with the presidents of Elvis Presley fan clubs were limited because they yielded secondhand and generalized responses. What was needed was a vehicle which could easily reach and be readily accepted by large numbers of Presley followers. In May and July 1984 I obtained permission to pose three open-ended questions to the readers of the Elvis in Canada newsletter (Appendix II). I asked them to express the importance of Presley in their lives. Next, they were asked if they had ever been to Memphis. Finally, I asked the respondents the meaning and relative importance which they placed on the pilgrimage to Graceland. Eight people replied from Ontario and New York state, which constituted a response rate of only one per cent. In November 1984 the Reflections of Elvis Fan Club, based in Fort Wayne, Indiana, reprinted this survey after the president of that group saw it in the Elvis in Canada mailing. Only one

individual responded to this presentation of the three questions. I then asked other fan clubs to print the survey. Although three fan clubs from Australia, Germany and the United States complied to this request, I received only two letters, both from Germany.

The Elvis in Canada survey attracted media interest to the present study in July and August 1984. Brief articles appeared in the Toronto Star and the Commercial Appeal in Memphis. I was also interviewed by reporters from WHBQ-TV in Memphis and by several radio stations: CKOH, in Chatham, Ontario; CKO, in Toronto; and CBC, in Halifax. I had hoped that this exposure would prompt more people to write and tell about their experiences regarding Presley, but the results were insignificant.

Because the techniques discussed thus far did not yield enough information to paint a conclusive picture of the Memphis experience, I decided that it was absolutely necessary to actually visit the Presley mansion for an extended period of time. In preparation for this field research, I conducted a small pilot survey of a tourist population at the Elvis Presley Museum, located in Niagara Falls, Ontario, on 20 May 1984. The underlying purpose of the Niagara study was to develop my interviewing skills and to determine the effectiveness of the questions posed. I obtained permission to conduct the survey within the exhibit area of the museum. The interviews consisted of three sets of open-ended questions (Appendix III). The first of these asked the purpose of the respondent for being in Niagara Falls, the length of visit and the activities which

had been planned for that time. I posed questions about prior experience in Niagara Falls to ascertain the relative importance of the Presley attraction. The second set of questions was designed to probe the respondent's perceptions and interpretations of Elvis and the museum. The final set of questions asked the origin and occupation of the respondent. Seventeen respondents were chosen by random selection.

Several problems appeared with the pilot survey. The first dealt with its location and period of implementation. The Presley museum was chosen because it seemed to me that the effectiveness of questions relating specifically to the singer could be readily determined there. Four months prior to the pilot study and again in January 1985, the Elvis Presley Museum was a focal point of a weekend gathering of fans from Ontario, New York and Ohio to commemorate the birthday of their hero. However, during the study period the museum was not found to be an inducement for travel to Niagara Falls. The use of open-ended questions generally proved to be somewhat ineffective because the museum was patronized by the curiosity seeker rather than people with an intense interest in Elvis. The method was not defective, but rather the answers given by many of the respondents were not conducive to further probing. Also the behavior and comments of the respondents indicated that they were not willing to engage in lengthy interviews because of the limited amount of time they had to spend in Niagara Falls. However, this study was very beneficial because it pointed out that the questions I asked about

Elvis focused on superficial aspects such as his physical appearance and music rather than his deeper significance. So I changed questions for the next phase of the research.

The final and most important step of the research process was to spend five weeks in Memphis between 16 July and 20 August 1984. The final week of this research coincided with the Elvis International Tribute Week. During this time, 21,000 Presley fans were present to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the singer's death, 16 August 1977 (Dixon 1985).

I interviewed key figures in the Presley-Memphis scene including Richard Davis, Vester Presley, and Billy Smith, who were respectively Elvis's valet, paternal uncle and maternal cousin. The first question I asked these gentlemen was what meaning Graceland has for them and whether the building's significance has changed since Presley's death. I also asked them to account for Elvis's mass appeal. Lastly, I requested Presley's associates to hypothesize why people continue to travel great distances to visit the singer's mansion and grave site.

Because Vester Presley was formerly a security guard at Graceland and gave informal tours of the property during Elvis's lifetime, I asked him to estimate attendances for that time period. Another long-time security guard provided comparable information, as well as describing Elvis, the man, and Elvis, the entertainer.

Next, I had casual conversations with three other security officers stationed at the front gates of the Presley mansion (Figure

1.1). These gentlemen were asked to report any irregular occurrences which had recently taken place. I also questioned the security guards about the kinds of inquiries they had received from the general public.

An indepth interview was conducted with Kenneth H. Brixey, Marketing Director and Operations Manager of Gracelands Enterprises, the corporate body in charge of the mansion tours. I asked Mr. Brixey to describe the demands and demographics of those people taking the mansion tour, the drawing power of Graceland, and the intended experience of that place. Mr. Brixey also offered explanations for Elvis's initial and continued popularity, as well as the details about his acquaintanceship with Elvis Presley. At this time Mr. Brixey granted me limited access to the Graceland grounds for the purpose of interviewing and observing patrons.

The major information was derived from open-ended questions which were posed to Memphis visitors. My original intent was to conduct these interviews at various Presley-related sites throughout Memphis in order to discern varying degrees of interest in him. That is, I postulated that obscure sites would attract persons deeply interested in Elvis's personal life. However, I found by talking to Kenneth Brixey and other tour operators that only insignificant numbers of people know of the existence of these other sites. This situation changed in mid August when Presley fans were in the city in great numbers. Early in the field research, I spent one day interviewing people at the Elvis Presley Plaza where a nine-foot



statue stands on Beale Street (Figure 2). Although this site is centrally located in Memphis, it attracted too few visitors to warrant spending a second day there. Because of the high cost and time involved in travelling to Elvis's birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi, I decided not to go to that site. Interviews held in Memphis confirmed a relative lack of interest in his Mississippi home.

Each day I held interviews in one of three locations: the front gate of Graceland, a location within yards of the Presley mansion and grave, or in front of one of the souvenir shops across the street from the house (Figure 1.1). Altering the locations of the interviews did not influence the range of answers. I spent one day interviewing people as they exited Presley's private airplane and highway coach, which are permanently on display in the Graceland ticket area, because I wondered whether their environmental experiences on the vehicles would differ from those in the mansion.

I used a random number table to select ninety-two per cent of the 209 respondents in the interviewing process. Because of the limited number of people visiting the Presley statue on Beale Street, the first person to arrive at the conclusion of the preceding interview was chosen; seven people were interviewed. The remaining people were approached through selective sampling primarily during the Elvis International Tribute Week in mid August. This was done because the tourist rather than the pilgrim was still the dominant figure at Graceland during this time. I also reasoned that slight alterations in the sampling technique would be much less pronounced

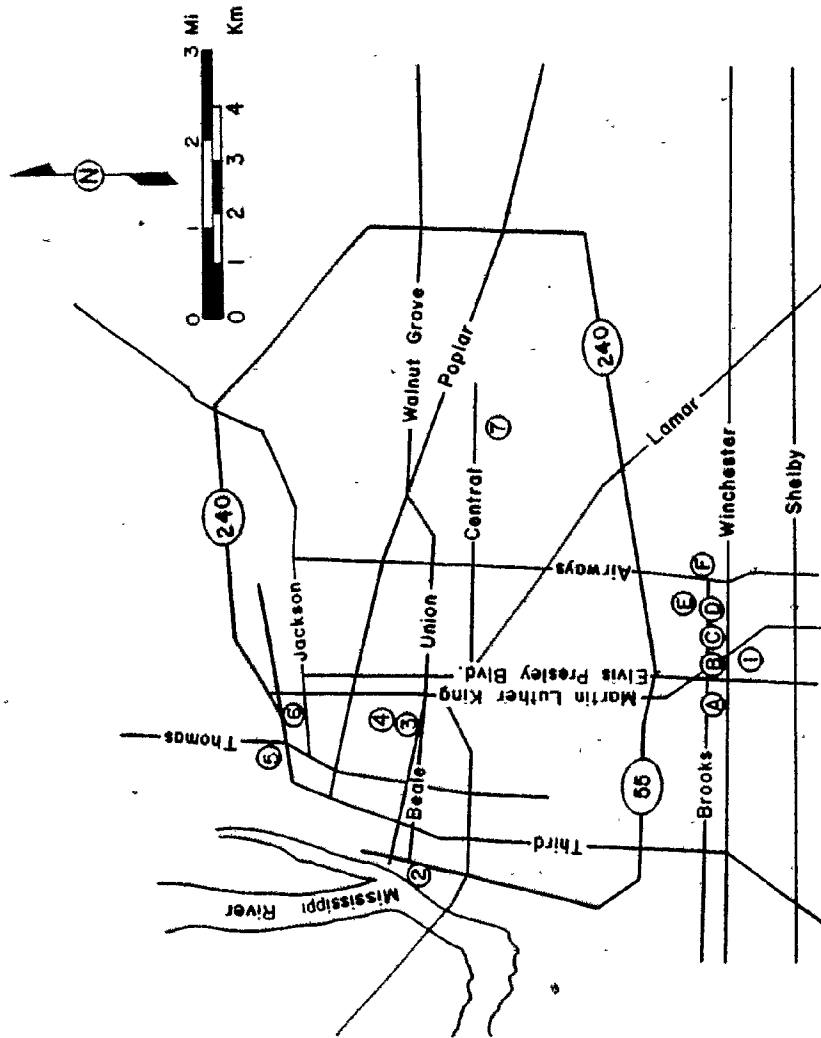
FIGURE 2 : MEMPHIS

LEGEND

- ① Graceland
- ② Elvis Presley Plaza
- ③ Sun Studio
- ④ Elvis Presley Trauma Center
- ⑤ American Sound Studio
- ⑥ Humes High School
- ⑦ Memphis State University

AREA HOTELS

- ④ Airport Inn
- ⑥ Howard Johnsons
- ③ Holiday Inn
- ④ Days Inn
- ⑤ Hilton
- ⑥ Travelodge



than changing interview locations to where the pilgrims congregated. Furthermore, special events such as auctions and dances were not conducive to indepth interviewing. Because the focus of the study was Graceland, I decided that it was appropriate to continue holding interviews in that general vicinity.

The participants in the interviews were queried in three areas, the first of which focused on attitudes and perceptions (Appendix IV). I requested the respondents to express any feelings they might have for Presley, to state whether various sites related to Presley were meaningful to them, and to describe their experiences and expectations of these places. The second set of questions focused on their motivations for travel, activities and length of stay in Memphis. As a cross-check to answers regarding the meaning of Graceland, I asked the respondents if they had ever been to Memphis before and if they had ever contemplated the journey when Elvis was alive. The final set of questions focused on demographic information. Following each interview I made a brief description of the respondent. The interviews ranged in length from a few minutes to one half hour, depending on the participant's interest in Presley and Graceland. The longer interviews were done by saying "can you expand on that?" after answers were given to certain questions.

Seven people had moved to Memphis on a permanent basis because that city was Elvis Presley's home. This group included Dennis Wise, a fan and professional imitator of Presley. Interviews were held with all but one of these people. These sessions were more extensive

than those conducted with the random sample because additional questions could be asked as the respondents had more information to convey (Appendix V).

I also utilized observational techniques in the field research to support the data acquired in the interviews. For fifteen minutes prior to every two hour period of the random interviews, I conducted time sampling of overt behaviors. In addition, I shot photographs each day during the observation time slots. During my weekly tours of Graceland, I made unobtrusive observations. Following the tour I took notes. Presley's private jet was also studied on a similar basis. Because of the limited amount of patronage to Elvis's highway coach, I only boarded this vehicle when I noticed that somebody had purchased a ticket for that attraction. Every second or third day I visited Meditation Gardens from 6:30 A.M. until 7:45 A.M. Before the daily tours commence people are allowed to walk on the grounds of Graceland in designated areas. I did not approach anybody for an interview during this time because I reasoned that that kind of activity might influence the behavior of others who were present. I did not take notes until the visitation period was over and the other visitors had left. One observation period was allotted to each of three other sites. I conducted these observations at Sun Studio, American Sound Studio and Humes High School during Elvis International Tribute Week (Figure 2). Observations were also made at a memorial service held by several of the singer's associates on the anniversary of Presley's death. Finally, I made unobtrusive

observations during other activities related to Presley.

In order to gain further insight into the Memphis scene, I collected other useful information in a less formal manner during the field research. I purchased local newspapers on a continued basis to see how much coverage they were giving to Presley or Graceland. An interview was held with Beth Pease, editor of Graceland News, an independent Memphis newspaper with international circulation. I also contacted the present owners of the home once occupied by Elvis's father to discern the degree of public interest in that dwelling, as well as the meanings placed on it by its occupants.

In summary, I used a variety of techniques to gain different perspectives on the same phenomenon. But how did I actually work with the raw data?

### Analysis

The method of analysis adopted for the present study was largely qualitative in nature. Patton (1980, 311-13) states that the first step in qualitative analysis is to read through all field notes and interviews in order to sort the data into categories. For each site, I could identify both recurring and unique behaviors. I compared these behavior patterns to see whether they varied by setting or over time owing to the influx of hard-core fans as the anniversary of Presley's death approached. I sought commonalities and differences among the people who moved to Memphis, and among the associates of

Elvis. Throughout the analysis I was more interested in the quality of people's experiences and the deeper meanings which they bestow on their environment rather than in the number of each response.

The focus of the analysis was the data obtained from the random sample of 209 respondents. I read these interviews over several times to establish possible recurring themes. However, the size of the data base proved to be too cumbersome to draw any affirmative conclusions through this technique. Patton (1980, 301) suggests that the computer could be used to sort qualitative information. I assigned an identification number to each respondent. Next, I coded the open-ended interview responses according to the central messages which were conveyed. For example, answers such as "Elvis is like the brother I never had" and "he's my friend" were collapsed into the category "surrogate partner." If an individual closely identified with Elvis in this manner, then his or her other statements regarding Presley such as "he was a great singer" were deleted from the analyses; otherwise there would have been too many categories with only one entry. Then, I coded the data and entered it into the computer and manipulated through the use of an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) frequencies program. In the next step, I sorted the original survey forms based on the computer output. This was done to see how people with somewhat similar responses differ in the deeper levels of their experiences. To connect the various elements of the Presley-Memphis phenomenon, I performed forty-two SPSS crosstabulations of the data. I made

comparisons between the meaning of Graceland and the experiences within that house, the meaning of Elvis and the origin of the respondent, and the like. Again, the field notes were consulted to investigate the complexities of each pairing. Finally, I compared the frequency of each answer across interview locations.

By reading through the field notes after the computer sorting, I was able to identify thirty-one pilgrims in the larger sample. To avoid confusion, this subgroup will be referred to as transient pilgrims, whereas people who have permanently migrated to Memphis are called immigrant pilgrims. The greater majority of visitors to Graceland fall under the category of tourists. Four criteria were used to select the transient pilgrims. These were: primary destination, the meaning of Elvis, the importance placed on visiting Graceland, and to a lesser extent, length of stay in Memphis. Similar computer manipulations were performed on the transient pilgrim data as had been done with the larger sample. Rapid sorting by the computer allowed me to focus my attention on the actual statements of the respondents.

Comparisons were made between the transient pilgrims, immigrant pilgrims and the numerous tourists. This was done because the possibility existed that attitudes and behaviors of the touristic population were similar to those of the pilgrims. Conversely, where tourists differ from the two pilgrim groups, this would accentuate the perceptual aspects of the Presley-Memphis phenomenon.

Verification and validation of the results were accomplished by

comparing with the findings derived from the other sources of data. The fan club material was particularly useful in this regard. The categories and explanations derived through the analysis process were reviewed and evaluated several times before they were accepted as being legitimate (Patton 1980, 339). Finally, the significance and generalizability were explored.

#### Chapter Summary

The meaning or feeling of a place is an emotive rather than a rational evaluation, and so respondents were encouraged to describe their innermost feelings regarding their Memphis experience. Observational techniques were utilized so that overt behaviors could be compared with verbal responses. Frequency counts were tabulated to determine the universality of a particular belief, but the numbers were not an end in themselves, but rather a framework for organizing and categorizing the qualitative data.

Interpretation of the research findings, however, reflect previous work and theories, and so it is to these we turn next.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE PHENOMENA OF PILGRIMAGE AND HERO WORSHIP

Before looking at the field research findings, it is useful to have some background on current thinking in four areas: hero worship and pilgrimages, and the meaning and experience of place. It is to the first of these pairs we turn now. Crazes, hero worship, religion, pilgrimages and tourist travel -- all are relevant to the complex phenomenon of journeys to significant sites in the lives of popular heroes. Hero worship frequently resembles craze-like behavior in that great public interest may fade completely away in just weeks or months. In other instances, hero worship is similar to religious experiences because the followers are deeply committed to the person whom they venerate. Pilgrimages in popular culture are unique, but contain aspects of both other types of secular and religious travel. That is, people travel to the grave or home of their heroes for reasons other than mere sightseeing.

We now turn to a consideration of the factors which contribute to the creation of heroes.

## Heroic Figures

### Perception

To what extent do the hero's inborn qualities compare with the public's perception of him or her?

In a comprehensive discussion of the significance, symbolism and imagery of the Elvis Presley phenomenon, Brock (1979) indicated that there are a number of reasons why people idolize the late singer. First, because Elvis struggled his way out of a life of severe poverty he became a source of inspiration to others who are economically repressed. Similarly, Robertson (1980, 211) states that "the success of real heroes and heroines is a demonstration that America remains at the cutting edge of progress." Second, the initial disapproval of the singer by the adult population in the United States made him into a symbol of teenage rebellion against parental authority. Malone (1979, 133) argues that Elvis was chosen to symbolize the youth rebellion because of his wild antics on stage, but in reality Presley wanted to be accepted in the mainstream of society. In other words, Elvis Presley gained popularity, in part because of the perceptions which people had of him rather than what existed in reality. This point will be expanded upon in subsequent paragraphs. Finally, the entertainer demonstrated strong loyalties to his country and family (Brock 1979, 95-96). Brock thus indicates the reasons behind the singer's initial and continued popularity,

which in turn give meaning to Graceland and other Presley-related sites.

Kirkby (1979) and Middleton (1979) also consider Elvis Presley's mass appeal. Whereas Kirkby compares the singer to the innocent characters in American literature such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, Middleton examines his musical stylings. Kirkby (1979, 17) states,

the films of Elvis Presley testify to the enduring appeal of the innocent type. They speak of a simpler world where contrarities [sic] are resolved, where simplicity of the heart triumphs, where the hero ... is always good.

Similarly, Middleton (1979, 160) explains,

Elvis managed to combine in his singing and his image...the desire for peace, escape, a dream world where everything is safe and lovely, and secondly the fascination, half obsession, half afraid, with "the dark side," the irrational world of wild revolt and self-gratification...they are not opposed but complementary -- both can be seen as "escapes" from mundane everyday existence.

These works point out why the public became intrigued by Presley and his music. In short, the Presley studies which have been presented thus far show that the singer is a romantic hero. He reflects our ideals about personal achievement and life in general.

It was previously stated that the image of the heroic figure does not necessarily concur with reality.

what the hero is and does in terms of objective reality are less important than what he represents to our inner reality. The local man who saves a child from drowning is of less enduring interest

to us than our fictive or historical heroes: the former wants symbolism, and unless local mythopoeia provides him with it, we tend to displace him in our consciousness with the more value-charged heroes we seem to need (Rollin 1970, 435).

Similarly, Klapp (1949, 138) and Lawson (1969, 174) argue that personal qualities are generally unimportant in the selection of heroes because people are generally unfamiliar with the men and women whom they choose to venerate. For example, Buddy Holly and John F. Kennedy both attained public recognition before their deaths but were tragically killed before they had an adequate chance to prove themselves. These two men are revered not so much for their accomplishments, but rather for their prospects (Aquila 1982, 80; Kenan 1983, 53; Morrow 1983, 61).

Our heroes change with our perception of reality (Cummings 1972, 101). Freud (1964, 128-29) states that humans may allow themselves to believe almost anything when they lack a suitable reference point. For example, early people may have interpreted the excessively large physical size of a stranger as a divine quality. Heroes from the past are not discarded, but the way in which they are perceived may be dramatically altered (Cummings 1972, 101). Kenan (1983) examines the literature written about John F. Kennedy over the past twenty years. The basic finding of his research is that the perception of Kennedy as a great president has greatly diminished whereas his image as a romantic hero has persisted. The emotionalism surrounding his assassination has been replaced by more objective thought with the passage of time. In contrast, Robertson (1980, 199) states that some

heroic types are continually repeated by different actors such as Babe Ruth and Gary Cooper. This information supports the notion that the hero's status is a function of the perceptions of his or her followers.

Contrary evidence suggests that heroic figures must possess meritorious qualities. Durkheim (1965, 80-81) discusses ancestral worship in Australia by the Melanesians, and makes reference to similar rites in China, Egypt and Greece. He concludes that the tribe in question does not revere its ancestors because they are dead, but rather for their exceptional earthly deeds. The dead were also worshipped in life. The term "charisma" is frequently used to describe outstanding leaders. It is defined by Weber (1968, xvi) as follows:

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities.

Weber (1968, 20-22) states that the charismatic leader must continually prove his or her superiority by performing miracles or heroic deeds in order to retain a significant number of followers.

The literature suggests that people select their heroes on the bases of their own needs and the perceived qualities of those who are in the limelight. But another factor influences our decision as to whom we venerate.

### Media Influence

Very divergent viewpoints exist about the media's influence in shaping public opinion. Robertson (1980, 207) states that nobody can hope to obtain widespread recognition without the aid of newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Al Jolson, for example, had to perform for twenty years before he was heard by two million people, whereas Rudy Valee attained fame quickly at a time when there were over ten million radios in the United States (Sann 1967, 348). The media is also a vital contributor in maintaining public interest. Buddy Holly's musical legacy, for example, was kept alive during the early 1960s by singers such as Bobby Vee, Tommy Roe and J. Frank Wilson who copied the late star's vocal phrasings and inflections. The continued release of phonograph records, biographies and a major motion picture have also perpetuated Holly's popularity (Aquila 1982). Likewise, Tharpe (1979, 7) makes some interesting comments about the posthumous adoration of Elvis Presley:

Adulation is easily refreshed because all the films are available... The most grief stricken fanatic can see [Presley] so animated in his petulance or his pleasantries that his death is inconceivable. No matter how bad he was in a poor role, he is strikingly present.

This literature suggests that the hero needs a vehicle with which to propagate his or her image.

On the other hand, Klapp (1949, 139) argues that heroes do not usually spawn from publicity. Pratt (1979, 43) discounts the notion

that Elvis was the product of good management because of the large number of low-grade and yet highly successful records and movies which were released throughout the singer's twenty-three year career. Similarly, Davies argues that the popularity of the Beatles cannot be attributed to good promotions because the band acquired a very diverse audience, and other groups with better publicity programs have not achieved comparable fame. The Beatles owed much of their success to their musical abilities. Davies speculates that because the Beatles deviated from their original style of instrumentation and lyrics, the band was not able to maintain a strong emotional response from their audience, and thus the group's popularity waned (Davies 1969, 273, 277). The media probably does not create new trends, but rather it takes notice of trends which are developing (Moeller 1979, 43).

The general public is not a passive recipient of media presentations. A great deal of interaction takes place between a Hollywood producer and his movie audience. Through the examination of box office statistics and other forms of audience research, the film maker has an indication of which themes and ideas will succeed and which will not. The movie is molded so that it will have elements which will appeal to a very diverse audience (Gans 1957). According to Lichter (1978, 56) this was true of Presley movies which were made during the 1960s:

The rejection of ["Flaming Star" and "Wild in the Country"] changed the shape of Elvis' acting career for all times... the public would only accept Elvis with a guitar in his hand and a song on his lips.

Similarly, the amount of television news coverage given to the death of Elvis Presley determined which of the three major networks in the United States received the highest viewer ratings for that evening (Gregory and Gregory 1982, 35-38).

Tucker examined the changes in the public's perception of Elvis Presley between the years 1956 and 1965 through sampling national magazines such as Newsweek and Harper's. In the adult middle class view, the singer changed from being a public menace to being an accepted figure in American culture. This study concluded that it is extremely difficult to determine the extent to which the media influences people's perceptions (Tucker 1979, 28-39).

Budd and Ruben report some general findings regarding the effects of the mass media. First, the media is believed to be most effective in creating opinions on topics in which no opinions previously existed. Conversely, the media is relatively ineffective in changing opinions. The media does however solidify existing values and gradually establishes a standard against which people evaluate the world around them. People may be prompted by the media to participate in an event if they were already so inclined. Finally, the mass media substantiates the status of noted personalities (Budd and Ruben 1979, 9).

The literature which was cited in this subsection suggests several things. First, the hero needs to accrue status among his or her initial followers to attract the media's attention. Next, the



media is a vital tool in the diffusion and perpetuation of the hero's image. Third, the hero may have to conform to the public's changing perception of him or her. Finally, the media may prompt people to visit sites which are associated with the hero, but the basic need to do so must already exist.

But why do people establish heroes anyway? The next subsection focuses on the motives and experiences of followers.

### Followers

Emotional needs prompt people to worship gods and heroes and to participate in crazes. Participation in the citizen's band radio fad was found to have a positive correlation with feelings of social isolation (Kerbo, Marshall and Holley 1978). Similarly, the dance marathon craze, which spanned from the 1920s to the 1950s, relieved postwar tensions and anxieties, satiated the competitive needs of the participants, and served as a vicarious outlet for the emotions of the spectators (Calbria 1976).

Taylor examined the relationship between personality type and "Beatlemania", defined as "screaming, hysterical, involuntary behavior" in the presence of a Beatle stimulus (Taylor 1966, 81). Three hundred forty-six school children underwent a series of psychological tests to determine their emotional stability and assertiveness. For girls, immaturity and emotional instability could account for their keen interest in the singing group. Similarly,

Laird theorizes about Frank Sinatra's early appeal to adolescent females as follows:

preparation for motherhood naturally gives rise to unfamiliar sensations, among them increased emotional sensitivity... when it is most acute some girls are likely to swoon (cited in Sann 1967, 352).

Adolescent males were not allured to the Beatles out of an emotional need, but rather because they admired the group's instrumental styling (Taylor 1966, 87-88). Taylor's study is very informative, but it paints hero worship as a deficiency response rather than as a legitimate human need.

Brauer (1978, 113), Mellers (1973, 192), Pratt (1979, 50-51) and Tharpe (1979, 5) briefly mention that the adoration of popular heroes is similar to religion. According to Tharpe (1979, 5) the posthumous slogan, "ELVIS LIVES" has only one equivalent, "JESUS LIVES."

Weinstein and Bell recognize the veneration of saints in the period 1000 to 1700 A.D. as hero worship. Before Pope Urban VIII established official criteria for canonization in the seventeenth century, saints were selected by the common people who viewed chastity and the performance of miraculous deeds as the prime indicators of sainthood rather than informed Biblical preaching. Following the holy person's death, his or her devout followers journeyed to the tomb in search of miraculous healings (Weinstein and Bell 1982, 141-61). Because there is no clear delineation between hero worship and religion. The suggestion is that the journey to places like Graceland can be a very meaningful experience to some

people.

Marett (1914, 4-5) explains that the most real aspect of any religion to its adherents is probably its emotionalism. Likewise, Donovan states that authentic religious experiences are more important to people than the expression of theological beliefs. Furthermore,

we may be told how drunkenness is caused... but to know that is not to be drunk. Interpreting an experience as a religious one is dependent on man's perspective -- one person may hear the voice of God, whereas another hears only thunder (Donovan 1979, 1).

Mankind has not abandoned religion despite scientific knowledge because science can not address issues which extend beyond "objective reality" (Donovan 1979, 115).

The ideas above reinforce two points which were raised earlier in this section. First, people may choose to participate in crazes, hero worship or religious services out of an emotional need. Second, individuals may interpret the same experience quite differently.

Now that we have put hero worship into perspective, let us turn our attention to the motives of pilgrims because they provide insight into mankind's attachment to places which are relatively foreign.

### The Pilgrimage

People venture to holy places for a variety of reasons. An underlying factor which prompts a pilgrimage is one's perception of

the final destination. Among the pilgrims, conscious reasons for visiting a holy place are: the expression of faith, opportunities for spiritual and bodily healings, prestige, and comradeship. Tourists often find these same destinations to be alluring for aesthetic reasons.

The importance of the pilgrimage differs across cultures. Cardinal Ugo Poletti (1975, 5) declares that a journey to Rome is the most significant proclamation of Roman Catholic faith. By visiting important sites in the life of Jesus or a saint, Christians gain a sense of realism about their spiritual beliefs (Turner and Turner 1978, 33). To Muslims living throughout the world, Mecca transcends its earthly location.

[Mecca] is not a place: it is the beginning, the present, and forever, and whoever enters [Mecca] feels this and is shaken. The purpose... is to worship and enter into a close relationship with God (Kamal 1961, 43).

People become emotional on the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) not because they have found something, but rather that they have declared their faith (Kamal 1961, 6, 61). The Hajj is mandatory, but only for those people who can afford it. A trek which threatens the economic viability of one's family is considered evil (Kamal 1961, 29). Finally, consider this different approach to religion:

True worship is not dependent on buildings or any external stimuli, for God is worshipped in man's heart... This can occur when that person is in the world's most beautiful cathedral or when he is milking the cows in a barn (Cornwall 1983, 112-13).

Pilgrimage destinations may be alluring because they possess supernatural qualities. For instance, Roman Catholics believe that the hardships which they endure on a pilgrimage serve to magnify prayers for the souls of loved ones in purgatory (Turner 1975, 121). They are also certain that the dead have an influence on the fertility and health of the living (Turner 1975, 112, 118). Similarly, people living in China travel to shrines with the hope that their wishes about the future will come true (Turner 1973, 197). Some people perceive some places as miracle producing agents because holy relics or images are housed there (Turner 1973, 210). Residents of these sites frequently make a pilgrimage to some distant land, in search of a similar thing (Turner 1973, 211). During the Middle Ages, the caretakers of the various shrines had to continually invent more and more potent relics if they were to compete for pilgrim monies (Sumption 1975, 159-62). These bogus objects were very real to the pilgrims. Pilgrimages are also undertaken to repay a debt to a spiritual being for past miracles (Gross 1971, 142; Turner 1973, 197). Another common belief is that if a person dies in or enroute to a holy place such as Jerusalem or Mecca, then he or she is ensured a place in heaven because pure thoughts would accompany the termination of life (Sumption 1975, 130; Turner 1975, 166). The literature cited here reiterates a point which was raised in the preceding paragraph -- that is, the pilgrimage is much more than a journey to a significant site.

In contrast, pilgrimage destinations are sometimes visited for very secular reasons. As an illustration, in 1960 two circuses, a vaudeville show and gambling facilities were set up in the general vicinity of the shrine of Bom Jesus, a Brazilian saint (Gross 1971, 142). These activities were a spin-off effect of a very serious rite. Likewise, merrymaking on journeys to sacred places was also quite characteristic of the medieval period.

However hard they may have prayed at the end of the journey, they appear, during Chaucer's time at any rate, to have given themselves up to enjoyment on the way, and when they raised their eyes to heaven it will be generally found that they did so in order to take aim at it with the end of a bottle (Heath 1971, 44).

Curiosity seekers made Rome the most popular tourist resort of the fifteenth century (Sumption 1975, 256). Conversely, the itinerary of Hindu pilgrimages in India is very structured to impede nonreligious motives among the participants (Bharati 1963, 137). Such information suggests two things for this present study. First, dedicated adherents of popular heroes may have several reasons for visiting significant places such as the opportunity to perform rituals, and entertainment. Second, the activities of the participants may attract the attention of previously disinterested parties.

Similarities and differences exist between the experiences of pilgrims and tourists. Although the journey and destination of pilgrims and of the pilgrimage tourists may not appear to differ they seek very divergent experiences. Pilgrims seek miracles and

encounters with spiritual beings, whereas tourists want to commune with nature or recreate (Pfaffenberger 1983, 72). Turner and Turner argue that pilgrims and tourists share some strong similarities. Pilgrims are not only motivated for religious reasons, but also by their sense of wonder, curiosity and architectural appreciation. Tourists not only have recreational pursuits, they also seek a higher level of existence than they can find at home (Turner and Turner 1978, 20-23). Cohen adopts a phenomenological approach to examine the desired experiences of tourists and discusses a continuum of five tourist goals ranging from recreation to spiritual change (Cohen 1979, 183, 190-91). The present information provides further support that the journey to Memphis is not an exercise in frivolity. It has the potential of being a very emotion laden experience.

Finally, individuals may visit sacred places to gain prestige among their fellows at home, and/or to seek camaraderie with similar others. Increased status seldom results from one's participation in the sacred journey (Turner 1975, 166). By contrast, the Japanese pilgrim gains prestige from his or her venture, as may be seen in the pilgrimage club uniforms on which may be sewn the official seals of the shrines visited (Pratt 1928, 51).

In short, pilgrimages vary across cultures, but there is a great deal of commonality too. First, holy expeditions are almost always associated with the celebration of Christ or some religious leader from the past such as a saint. Second, individuals feel closer to the object of their veneration if they can have a personal

experience. Third, sites associated with the life of a special person are set apart from the rest of the world in the minds of the pilgrims. These places are often associated with extraordinary events such as miracles. Fourth, the pilgrim not only becomes a better person for making the journey, but also believes that he or she will be guaranteed a place in heaven. In some instances the pilgrim also gains earthly prestige. Next, pilgrimages often take on a holiday atmosphere, which in turn attracts many others. Finally, pilgrimages are important because they facilitate strong feelings of brotherhood among people from many different localities and lifestyles.

#### Chapter Summary

People need to seek out meaningful experiences, and look beyond superficialities. Many different things have the potential to satisfy these desires; crazes, hero worship, religion and travel are common examples. However, the attractiveness of a particular person, place or activity may differ substantially among individuals.

Let us turn, next, to a closer examination of environmental perception and the meaning of place.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF PLACE

In the previous chapter, I began to point out that sites which are in some way linked with the heroic figure may hold a profound fascination for his or her followers. Pilgrimages which are made to these kinds of destinations are a very visible way of paying homage to either the sacred or secular hero. The present chapter probes deeper into the essence and significance of localities. Specifically, the geographical literature on the image, experience and meaning of place is investigated.

#### Significance of Place

Places are much more than geographical locations; they are an integral part of human identity (Relph 1976a, 23). Special places in the life of the individual are cherished because they heighten his or her awareness of reality (Dovey 1978, 28-30; Eliade 1957, 24).

Drunkards' problems result from a lack of emotional attachments to places (Godkin 1980, 77-79). The ideal home setting provides security, familiarity and emotional warmth to its occupants (Dovey 1978, 28). Such material suggests that if people cannot find meaningful settings in their own lives, they may begin to identify with sites which are associated with their heroes (Buttimer 1980a, 185).

Heroes and places can provide us with remembrances of bygone eras. Lowenthal examined mankind's view of the past throughout the history of the United States. Early settlers did not contemplate past accomplishments, but rather they based their lives on the potential of their new homeland. By the nineteenth century, this optimism started to fade. Americans began to commemorate key figures, places and events in their history because the present was filled with corruption and the large-scale immigration of undesirables. Reminders of the past are needed to help stabilize rapid changes which are occurring in the present (Lowenthal 1976, 91, 110). Likewise, Ford (1974, 35), Lynch (1972, 122-24) and Riley (1979, 16) state that recollections and fantasies about the past give people a sense of continuity in their lives, which enables them to put present circumstances into perspective. Settings are assigned meaning when they begin to fulfill this function (Ford 1974, 33). In brief, these sources reinforce the notion that people need to have noteworthy ties to places and past events.

Barber investigates the purpose of war memorials. Monuments are vital because they symbolize the social group's values and feelings towards the persons or events which are memorialized. When people congregate at a memorial, common ideals are strengthened because they see similar emotions being expressed by their fellows. War memorials become devoid of any meaning when society ceases to maintain interest in them (Barber 1972, 328).

I would like to impress upon the reader that places are much

more than the physical materials from which they are constructed. This is particularly true of sacred space. Eliade holds that sacred space is the center of reality, meaning and the universe. Everywhere else is without form. Pious people believe that their country is the nucleus of the world, their city is the heart of the nation, and the temple in which they worship is the center of the city (Eliade 1957, 43-46). Similarly, Tuan (1966, 33) sees the home as diametrically opposed to the chaos beyond it, and as the focal point of the individual's world. Tuan (1978a) also comments that anything which is sacred elicits awe, possesses power, and is unique and ordered. Since the advent of the human race, sacred space has been perceived as the link between the physical world and the domain of the gods (Shepard 1967, 37; Tuan 1978a, 91). The sites of the birth and death of a charismatic leader sometimes assume the qualities of that person (Tuan 1974, 146). As an illustration, early ancestral worshippers in China assigned human qualities, as well as rank and title, to mountains and rivers because the dead still played an important role in local prosperity (Tuan 1975a, 26). In brief, these theorists build upon the notion that people need to have both a sense of orderliness and belongingness in their lives. If they cannot find adequate meaning in their daily sphere of existence, then they may feel compelled to search elsewhere. An important consideration to the researcher then, is what individuals value in their lives. A truly fulfilling experience might not be possible in the home setting if their hero or religion emerged in some faraway place.

Almost all levels of culture have separate, dedicated, fenced and hallowed spaces... To enter sacred space is [a]...religious experience (Graber 1976, 4).

Early cities were revered because they approximated the orderliness and permanence of heaven, whereas the lands beyond their borders were viewed as chaotic. Today, for many North Americans the wilderness represents purity and lastingness in a corrupt and rapidly changing world (Tuan 1978a, 86-87). Similarly, uninhabited regions may be perceived as sacred space; the emotional ties which many people have to wilderness areas are largely religious in character (Graber 1976, 111). Some people experience ecstasy upon finding an ideal landscape, and subsequently express a desire to visit the location as often as possible, or to move there and establish permanent residency (Graber 1976, 40). Sacredness, then, can evolve from many facets of life. Furthermore, the meaning and experience of place are intertwined: emotional responses to a particular setting are both a cause and consequence of personal values.

In summary, the literature indicates that people need to have emotional ties to places for their own sense of well-being. Some individuals have very strong emotional bonds to locations in their childhood. The lives of other people are centered in the present home setting. A third case is where people find meaning in distant lands, which are not a part of their own personal history. Next, places transcend their physical characteristics. War memorials epitomize societal values, and sacred spaces provide us with mystical

or idyllic experiences. Finally, the special status which is bestowed upon a particular place tends to be solidified in the mind of the individual when other people, who are attracted to that setting, have similar beliefs.

The next section illustrates that there is a substantial degree of variation in how people view and experience places.

### Interpretation of Place

Several factors have an influence on the way in which we perceive and experience our surroundings. These include: the imagination, age, sex and culture. First, I will point out that preconceived notions about faraway places may prompt or dissuade long-distance travel. Next, I will present theoretical and empirical research which ponder the effects of personal background and human physiology on our interpretations of place.

In Chapter III, I indicated that heroes are partially created in the minds of their adherents. Similarly, the essence of places is a partial function of human cognizance. Lowenthal (1967, 17) states, "man's world is a fabric of ideas and dreams, some of which he manages to give visible form." Matore also comments,

we do not grasp space only from our senses...we live in it, we project our personality into it by emotional bonds, space is not just perceived it is lived (cited in Relph 1976b, 10).

Furthermore, we not only have images of the places in which we live

and work, we also have preconceived notions of distant lands Imaginary places and treasures, such as the Passage to India, prompted the voyages of many early explorers (Allen 1976). Likewise, Renwick and Cutter (1983) examine the captions, symbols, map distortions and stereotypic photographs on post cards, and conclude that people base their travel decisions on simplistic or misleading images, which are presented by advertisers. Finally, people tend to experience their destinations more according to original suppositions rather than to actual conditions there (Allen 1976, 56; Renwick and Cutter 1983, 30). The mind, then, has a tremendous influence on how we view our surroundings. The aforementioned literature is significant because it suggests to me that the Presley-Memphis phenomenon is, at least in part, a visible expression of people's fantasies. Because both heroic figures and places are subject to people's interpretations, it is understandable why places which are readily associated with heroes are frequently assigned mystical qualities, such as those which were outlined in the previous section.

Remembrances of past places and events are also a product of the imagination and personal evaluations about what was important (Lowenthal 1975, 27-32). Lowenthal (1975, 33) explains that part of the appeal of the past is its remoteness. Because details about the past are clouded or missing, we can romanticize about how bygone days might have been (Lowenthal 1975, 5-6). This is a rather debatable point when one is discussing the pilgrimage in popular culture. Some people may wish that their dead hero were still among the living,

whereas others may find the untouchable aspects of the deceased to be particularly attractive. By visiting important sites which are connected with the hero, followers can begin to formulate vivid images about what that person's life may have been like.

Relph (1976a, 24) holds that it is impractical to generalize about mankind's perception of the world because it is compounded by differences among individuals. Age, sex and sensory abilities are contributing factors in human experience (Tuan 1974, 3; Tuan 1975b, 152). A child under the age of seven cannot discern landscapes until he or she has been able to distinguish himself or herself as a separate entity from other persons (Tuan 1974, 3-12, 56).

Lynch's well-known study on people's perceptions of urban settings, wherein subjects were requested to embark on imaginary trips, and to sketch and describe their present environments, concluded that people of the same age, sex or occupational grouping have similar images of the city, but significant differences also exist among individuals (1967, 87). Also, Lynch's research design lends support to my own because the researcher's relative lack of preconceived notions allows for the emergence of new ideas and concepts.

The symbolic, emotional and physical links between the elderly and their environments were investigated by Rowles (1978a). Five participants were selected. Neighborhood and duration of residency were held constant. Rowles (1978a, 38-42) employed open-ended conversations, and participated in the daily activities of the

subjects, at least once a week for a period of six months. The purpose of this informal relationship between the researcher and his subjects was to establish a friendly atmosphere in which the latter would readily share their experiences with the former (Rowles 1978a, xvii-xix, 38). Rowles asserts that geographical experiences consist of four components. First, the same location differs in its meaning and use from individual to individual (Rowles 1978a, 160). Similarly, Dovey (1978, 28) states that there is a great deal of subjectivity regarding the actual meaning of the home environment to the individual occupants. However, meanings for a particular place may be shared, or may vary from context to context (Rowles 1978a, 174; Tuan 1974, 153). The second component is fantasy. Third, experiences are dependent upon the individual's familiarity with a particular setting (Rowles 1978a, 164-74). The final aspect of human experience is that people are not only spatially mobile, they vary from one another in their ability to maneuver themselves within any given environment (Rowles 1978a, 160).

An important aspect of Rowles's work is that it looks beyond the apparent superficialness of people's daily encounters with their surroundings. The material is presented as a narrative, and this format enhances the experiential dimension that the writer wishes to convey. The basic effect is that the reader feels that he or she is actually in the situation which is being described. This investigation is also significant to the present study because it points out the relatedness between the meaning and experience of



- place.

Lifton investigated the residual effects of the bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, on people's lives. A random sample of thirty-three survivors were interviewed in detail about the meaning of the event. Specifically, they were requested to disclose their fears, emotions and struggles in facing life with mental and physical deformities (Lifton 1967, 6-11). Forty-two scholars, writers and physicians who are experts in atomic warfare were also contacted. Throughout the text, the investigator quotes his subjects, and offers his own interpretations of the data. The general intent and structure of my study are very similar to those of Rowles (1978a). Both research projects explore the essence of a particular phenomenon, and the intricate details of human experience. Such goals mirror the aims of my own work.

Tourists and residents interpret their surroundings quite differently. As an illustration, the former may view an industrial basin as something ugly, whereas the latter may view the same scene as a symbol of local prosperity (Tuan 1974, 63-65). Motorists vary among each other in terms of their perceptions of the urban landscape: daily commuters look for changes in the roadside panorama such as a sporting event, whereas transients have an appreciation for the physical environment because it is new to them (Appleyard, Lynch and Myer 1967, 76-77). Tourists are not emotionally enjoined with the places that they visit; long-term residency and working with the land are prerequisites for deep-rooted bonding (Tuan 1974, 95-108).

There is, however, as I pointed out in Chapter III, a tremendous variation in tourist experiences. Furthermore, pilgrims often journey far from their homes in search of true meaning. In general, this information suggests that environmental experiences are dependent upon one's perspective and familiarity with the place in question.

Perception is also influenced by language and culture (Lowenthal 1961, 252-54). For example, a particular color may have special meaning in one society, but it is largely ignored in another culture. Rituals, customs and myths enjoin the members of a group with their surroundings (Relph 1976b, 31). In India, there are cases in which two or more vastly different religious sects endear the same site for divergent reasons (Sopher 1967, 53). However, in modern society the same place can evoke some common meanings across cultural groups because of the role played by the mass media in propagating certain images (Relph 1976b, 58). In a similar vein, as pointed out in the preceding chapter, a hero's status may be embellished by the creation of legends by his or her followers, and is perpetuated through mass communication networks. Cultures vary from each other in their emphasis about which of the five senses should be acutely developed, but Tuan maintains that individual differences in how the world is perceived are more significant (Tuan 1974, 45-46).

In summary, several factors influence one's experiences in the environment. First sensory acuity and physical mobility determine the extent to which the individual can relate with his or her

surroundings. Age and sex also have an ability to affect a person's perspective. Two underlying components of the aforementioned variables are bodily structure and socialization. Next, imagination and personal evaluations largely determine the significance of a specific geographical location to an individual. At the group level, certain cognitions are shared, and these images are perpetuated through rituals, folklore, reminiscences about scenes in old photographs, and the like. One's familiarity with his or her surroundings also plays a role in what elements in the environment are focused upon. Last, the meaning of a particular place is determined by the satisfactions which are derived in that setting. Within each of the aforementioned variables there is a tremendous degree of variation.

The literature pertaining to the experience and meaning of place is thus diverse and complex; too much so to cover completely here. Let us note how various strands appear in the writings of one of its recent contributors whom I found particularly congenial and applicable.

Edward Relph

I do not consider myself to be a "humanist geographer" or a "phenomenological geographer," or any of the other more traditional types of geographer. The very idea of slots makes me uneasy... And I am unmoved by appeals for the necessity of adopting specific philosophical postures like idealism, pragmatism, Marxism, or, heaven forfend, positivism (Relph 1984, 211).

So Relph does not restrict himself to just one line of thought. He does however, disavow quantitative methods because they are incapable of probing into the intricacies of one's relationship with his or her surroundings. Numeration masks the highly individual nature of human experience, and what is worse it dictates that the researcher remains aloof from his or her subjects (Relph 1976b, 6; Relph 1981b, 30, 174; Relph 1984, 212).

Relph has paid considerable attention to phenomenology in several of his papers, such as "The Phenomenological Foundations of Geography" (1976a). He apparently likes a phenomenological approach because it prompts the researcher to search beyond superficialities, and to describe the world as it is experienced (Relph 1976a, 1; Relph 1981a, 101-09). Nevertheless, he does not necessarily adhere to one of its basic precepts, which is to set aside prior knowledge and biases at the outset of an inquiry (Relph 1984, 211).

How does Relph implement his goals? His approach has three interrelated components: "seeing", "thinking", and "describing." The foundation of good research involves careful observations in the real world rather than a reliance on preexisting data. In turn, good observations are much more than the recognition and notation of objects and events. They involve careful thinking. Relph cautions that seeing and thinking must be carefully balanced to establish and maintain a clear focus in an investigation, as well as to avoid making erroneous suppositions. Description transcends itemization. It relays the researcher's interpretations and impressions to others.

Good description depends upon the quality of the preparatory research. Relph dismisses criticism that his work is trivial because it is descriptive rather than laden with hard data; he argues that the meaning of place is too complex an issue to be quantified and so qualitative research is vital to our understanding of complicated issues (Relph 1984, 213-22).

In Relph's view, the world is comprised of spaces, landscapes and places, which are interrelated. We experience spaces as delineated by landscapes, and meaningful spaces and landscapes constitute places (Relph 1976a, 10). Because my study focuses on places, let us consider the component in more detail.

As indicated throughout this chapter, places are much more than geographical locations. They are centers of meaning in human experience. Furthermore, Relph states:

The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve... There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences...a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world (Relph 1976b, 43).

That is, places are delineated from the rest of the environment because of the meanings that we consciously or subconsciously impose upon them.

Because places are a function of human commitment, they emerge and fall into oblivion over time. This is true at both the

individual and group level. Relph states that customs and rituals are purposeful attempts to bond with their surroundings. When these activities lose their significance, then places may lose their originally intended identities. Relph also points out that the character of places is also influenced by structural modifications which are imposed upon buildings or the physical environment (Relph 1976b, 31-33). As an illustration, The Church Restaurant in Stratford, Ontario is housed in what was once a temple of worship. In this case, the building's physical aspects have remained largely intact, but its intended usage, and thus the meanings imposed upon it, have been dramatically altered.

Two important definers in the relationship between person and place are what Relph calls "insideness" and "outsideness." He explains,

To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are, the stronger is this identity with the place (Relph 1976b, 49).

There are various degrees of belongingness with places. First, one may experience "vicarious insideness." That is, a person may develop a strong attachment to places which he or she has visited only indirectly through books, magazines or audiovisual presentations. Feelings toward faraway places are usually strongest when one can easily identify with those locations because described experiences are similar to those in the home environment. Next, "behavioral insideness" implies that an individual may be physically present in a

setting without becoming personally involved in it. In this mode of experience the individual simply recognizes where he or she is.

"Empathetic insideness" means that the individual is emotionally involved with his or her surroundings. For example, a tourist may be moved by the pyramids in Egypt, and have an understanding of the local symbolism without being committed to that environment.

"Existential insideness" is the most profound relationship which can exist between people and places. In this instance, the identities of a place and its inhabitants are intertwined. In other words, places derive their character from their inhabitants, and people know who they are from the places that they inhabit. "Existential insideness" not only implies a strong sense of belongingness to one place, but that the individual will feel like an outsider in every other place (Relph 1976b, 51-55).

We noted earlier in this chapter that to have roots in a particular place is an important human need. But what does it mean to have roots anyway? Relph builds upon the adage that a house is not a home. The place that one calls home is the center of personal and societal identity. To have roots means familiarity, but more importantly it means to have a heartfelt respect and commitment to one's abode. These feelings are strongest when one has had a myriad of experiences in a particular setting. If a person lacks such attachments to a place, then he or she will also lack a clear perception of him or herself. Human-place relationships are irreplaceable, but Relph points out that people who move frequently

may be able to establish roots if they are open to new experiences or if they can find similarities among the various places that they inhabit. A person may reflect upon his or her involvement with place or the attachment may be entirely subconscious. Relph cautions that it is difficult and even erroneous to generalize about the bond between person and place (Relph 1976b, 37-41).

Images are mental pictures. Relph indicates that there are a multitude of factors which influence our image of places. Each individual has his or her own experiences, emotions, memories, intentions, imagination and present situation. Nevertheless, there are common images which are shared within each culture. The members of the group propagate certain agreed upon values and symbols which they may pass on from generation to generation. The sharing of experiences is facilitated by a common language, and the exchange may be necessary because people depend upon one another to survive. For example, the members of a big city gang defend a common territory and share the same street language. There are also images of places which cross group boundaries. These images are created by opinion makers and are superficial. Relph criticizes tourist destinations in particular because they share a sameness. Finally, certain places may stimulate common responses because they possess what Relph calls "high imageability". Unique structural design or the site's link with an heroic figure are two possible prompters (Relph 1976b, 37, 57-58, 92-93).

A fundamental problem in today's Western society is the



disappearance of meaningful places (Relph 1976b, 143; Relph 1984, 222). Relph calls this plight "placelessness", and he attributes it to mass culture because it propagates sameness. For example, new residential subdivisions are often contrived in their entirety, rather than allowing home owners to select their own blueprints. Relph argues that these structures may not acquire their own identities because they all look the same. A similar problem lies with chain restaurants and hotels. Communities are beginning to lose their unique identities because of the mass infiltration of restaurants like McDonald's which are uniform in their appearance and product line throughout the world. How can one establish roots, and hence his or her own identity, when the immediate environment is just like everywhere else? (Relph 1976b, 92, 143).

In essence, Relph is arguing that people do have firm attachments to places. Places gain their identities from people, and in turn, people gain a sense of who they are from the places that they inhabit. People have varying degrees of involvement with places. In terms of my study, this might suggest that some people may see Graceland as a sterile tourist attraction, whereas others are there to gain a deep appreciation for their hero. Relph also states that absolute involvement in one place precludes the same level of involvement somewhere else. This has profound implications for my study. If one cannot find adequate meaning in the home environment, then he or she may actively seek out a place which can provide them with strong images and rich experiences.

## Discussion

Let me try to integrate the massive literature relevant to this research. People become involved in the latest fad, hero worship, religion, pilgrimage, or place because they have a strong need for affiliation. Both the source and the extent of emotional satisfaction varies tremendously among individuals. There is no universal hero or religious dogma. Personal disposition, sensory acuity, age, sex and past experience are all influencing factors.

The meaning and attributes of both heroes and places are largely determined within the mind of the individual. Some similarities, however, do exist because the media projects certain images of heroes, places and events, which then become a part of collective experience. Ideas are also shared through personal interactions and traditional practices.

The approaches of Relph and the others mentioned in this chapter underlie my recognition and analysis of the Presley-Graceland experience, to which we now turn.

## CHAPTER V

### AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESLEY PILGRIMAGE

After having put hero worship, pilgrimages, and the meaning and experience of place in some contextual framework in the preceding chapters, it is time now to look specifically at the Elvis Presley-Graceland experience and the findings of my five weeks of field research there in July and August, 1984. As indicated in the second chapter, I interviewed 209 people and made notes not only of their responses to particular questions but also of their behavior and apparent emotions at various places. Visitors fell into three groups: transient pilgrims, immigrant pilgrims, and tourists. This chapter summarizes and analyzes my findings. After noting the origins and characteristics of the respondents, consideration is given to this study's primary questions: what is it about Presley that prompts people to visit the places associated with his life, and what are their experiences once they are in Memphis? Where possible, my findings are compared with a survey conducted only slightly earlier, in June, 1984, by Graceland Enterprises. That study will be referred to hereafter as the Enterprises survey. Their study had 1,392 respondents.

#### Respondents

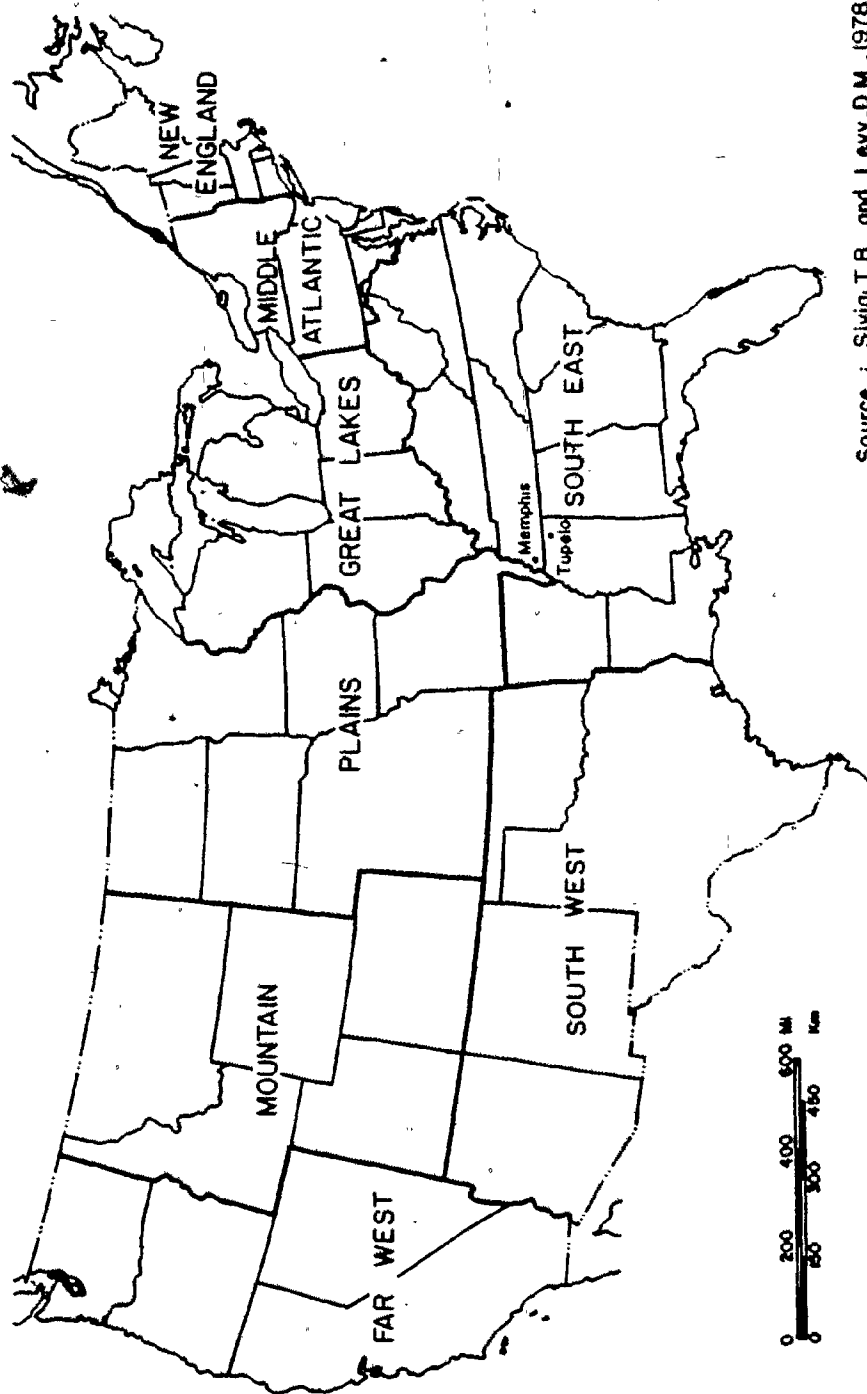
What are the characteristics of Graceland's visitors, and from

where do these people originate?

Although the Presley mansion is visited by people from around the globe, some areas are more represented than others. Ninety-two percent of the respondents in my study were residents of the United States. Furthermore, the vast majority of the American visitors lived in the area east of what could be called the Texas-Minnesota axis. This occurrence appears to be a function of distance and urbanization. The south eastern states ranked highest, accounting for thirty-two per cent of the respondents (Figure 5.1). The Great Lakes and South West Regions placed second and third with nineteen per cent and sixteen per cent, respectively. At the state level Texas was most important, as it contributed twelve per cent of the respondents. Similarly, Kenneth Brixey, Graceland Enterprises'

Marketing Director and Operations Manager commented that fifteen per cent of the mansion's patrons came from Texas, which makes it the most represented state. Illinois (6%), Tennessee (6%) and Ohio (5%) claimed the next three positions. It should be noted that the rankings of Illinois and Ohio were the same as those obtained in the Enterprises survey. Tennessee gained importance in my sample. Conversely, Indiana and Michigan fell dramatically in my study from their tied position at second place with Ohio in the Enterprises survey. Because the Enterprises survey attendance figures for Graceland did not generally vary from the findings of my sample, the aforementioned differences can be attributed to seasonality. Northerners tend to travel south in the winter and spring months to

**FIGURE 5.1 : REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES**



Source : Sivia, T.B. and Levy, D.M., 1978

escape cold weather. The remaining respondents come from Canada, England and Europe. I did not interview anybody from Australia, France and Japan because of the relatively small number of people from these areas. This did not suggest a lack of interest in Presley. Mail correspondence with Wayne Hawthorne from Australia revealed that the Elvis Presley Fan Club of Victoria chartered a trip to Memphis in March 1984. Somewhat similarly, Brixey stated that although Japan only accounts for one per cent of Graceland patrons, it is the fastest growing source in terms of the number of people visiting Presley's home. In recent years Japan has experienced a huge wave of nostalgia for early American rock'n'roll. Finally, Graceland public relations department has focused its attention primarily on English speaking regions (Brixey, 1984).

The transient pilgrims and immigrant pilgrims came from the same places as the tourists. However, the relative importance of pilgrimage travel was not necessarily related to the total number of people emanating from a particular region. For instance, the Middle Atlantic Region sent very few people to Graceland, but it ranked rather high in terms of pilgrimages. Similarly, three of the five people from England who were interviewed were pilgrims. In other words, as distance increased, commitment to Presley became a more important inducement to travel. Although immigrant pilgrims originated from Texas, Indiana and Florida, mail correspondence and conversations with Presley fans from around the world indicated that a few individuals from as far away as West Germany would like to

permanently migrate to Memphis because that city was Elvis Presley's home.

The kinds of people who responded to my field survey were very similar to those surveyed by Graceland Enterprises. Roughly fifty-five per cent of the respondents in both studies were female. I found that the divergency between males and females widened when the pilgrim population was isolated. Two thirds of all the pilgrims contacted were female. The corporate study revealed that blacks are very under represented at Graceland, accounting for only two per cent of its visitors. Similarly, I interviewed only a few individuals belonging to visible minorities. Both of these surveys tended to confirm the notion that Elvis Presley is a symbol of white ideals. Finally, the Enterprises survey found that fifteen per cent of its participants were teenagers or senior citizens (Commercial Appeal 5 August 1984, A19). Although I did not question people directly about their ages, I would not dispute this finding.

A significant minority of the participants in my study considered Elvis Presley to be a central aspect in their lives. How could a man who has been dead since 1977 have exerted such a profound influence over the lives of so many people? By considering the significance of Elvis we can begin to understand why to some people visiting Graceland was truly a pilgrimage rather than "a trip down memory lane."

### Elvis Presley's Significance

The meaning and hence the importance of Presley varied significantly across individuals, as the comments to me by Elvis's associates, pilgrims and tourists indicate. Brixey stated,

I knew Elvis. He rented the rides at Libertyland at night when I was the manager over there. My experiences were pleasant and warm...the same kind of charisma that Billy Graham and the major evangelists had...he had mass appeal.

Presley's relatives and associates who were in Memphis during the field research for this study agreed that the singer had special qualities. The singer's uncle, Vester Presley, stated in an interview,

Elvis had talent coming out of his ears...very few have that magnetism...it draws people... At home he was just old Elvis, but when he went on stage I said, "that ain't no kin of mine"...like changing into another man.

A similar comment was made by Billy Smith,

When Elvis started singing I didn't have any idea that he would be as big as that...just an older cousin. [The media did not invent Elvis.] He had a God-gift. The first time I heard him on the radio, I couldn't believe it was Elvis. I thought the world was crazy! He was a different person on stage.

People who personally knew Elvis agreed that he became popular thirty years ago and will remain a household word because he was a talented and generous person. Media hype gave the singer recognition



very early in his career, but he could have still become a star based solely on his own talents. However, the Presley pilgrimage has been deemed an "unexplainable phenomenon" by those same people.

Let us turn next to those people who knew Presley well enough by being exposed to him through the mass media and concert appearances that they chose to live in Memphis. Like Presley's friends, the immigrant pilgrims viewed Elvis as a magnetic and charitable human being. A woman belonging to this group stated,

Elvis is a person I would like to have met...like a son. He is somebody I've felt very protective of. I haven't always been this way. It all started when I went to a concert in 1976. Once you saw him live you were hooked...I have Elvisitis. I have to have everything.

Likewise, Dennis Wise, the Presley illusionist who moved to Memphis in 1983 to be in close proximity to Graceland and other fans like himself, examined his feeling as follows:

Elvis meant a lot to me...like a family...a father-figure. [My own father was always on the road driving a truck].. Elvis had the ability to care about another human. He loved his fans...he never lost that. [Other people in his position] don't give two dimes or a nickel to give you an autograph.

This appreciation of Elvis's humanness was also observed in the apartments of two immigrant pilgrims. The house of one young man was decorated with photographs of Presley which had been mailed to this person by the singer himself. Presley began answering this young man's letters in the early 1970s after learning that the latter had a

severe kidney ailment. Only one immigrant pilgrim, an elderly woman, actually met Elvis. She said that she treated him like any normal person. The immigrant pilgrims felt a kinship with him because he directly or indirectly provided them with an object of affection. At some point in their lives they were without loved ones. Presley filled that void. In return for the friendship and entertainment which Elvis has continued to give them after his death, the immigrant pilgrims were quick to defend his honor. These people indicated that Elvis is dead in a physical sense, but his spiritual essence flourishes in the vicinity of Graceland, and it was his presence which drew them to Memphis. Brock (1979, 116) also finds Presley fans who believe his ghost exists.

Feelings of kinship toward Presley were not limited to the immigrant pilgrims. One fifth of the transient pilgrims also reported what can be described as a personal relationship with Presley. A middle-aged woman from New York passionately stated,

Elvis was not part of this world...loved by everyone  
...appreciated what he had...honest and sincere. He  
thought he was nothing. I love Elvis the person  
first, the entertainer second. He was more than  
that...the brother I never had.

An elderly woman from England viewed Elvis as a spiritual mediator. She stated,

I'm a spiritualist...I prayed to Elvis to ask God to  
allow me to come to Graceland. Now that I have been  
here I can die in peace...I love Elvis as an  
entertainer. He told me to come here.

Roughly half of this group have had a spiritual encounter with Presley since his death, whereas the remaining members of the group did not vocalize any beliefs that his spirit still lives in the vicinity of his earthly Graceland. The major difference between these two subgroups was that the members of one felt that their friend or hero was swept from their lives by death, whereas the others believed that their comrade's soul has remained near Graceland because he loved his home. Nobody in this group professed that Elvis was a god and neither did anybody else that I encountered.

Next, half of the transient pilgrims focused their attention on Presley's personal qualities. Most commonly, these people admired his willingness to give of himself and his money to his family, friends, fans and charitable institutions. His ability to remain a humble person despite his great wealth and popularity also impressed many of these people. A young woman from England explained,

He didn't act stuck-up...kiddin' around all the time...took care of his parents. He's just great!

Although a few individuals belonging to this subgroup from the Great Lakes region mentioned that Elvis had charismatic qualities, the vast majority viewed him as a normal person with ideal personality traits and a musical talent.

The final group of transient pilgrims, which constituted one eighth of the total, considered themselves fans of his music. It should be stressed that this group of people was totally enthralled with the entertainment side of Elvis. Statements were given such as,

"I am very much an Elvis Presley fan," and "He's a legend in his own time." These people journeyed to Memphis to investigate his musical roots, but did not display the same degree of interest in the personal side of the late singer as the other pilgrims.

By examining the entire sample of 209 respondents I found that an overwhelming number of Graceland patrons were interested in Elvis. The remaining people were simply curious to see the interior of a star's home or had accompanied somebody who liked Elvis Presley. In general, what differentiated pilgrims and tourists was the duration and primary purpose of their travel time, as well as the intensity of feelings toward Presley. While the vast majority of pilgrims very much admired Elvis the person, only one tenth of the tourists held similar views. With respect to this response the pilgrims were much more enthusiastic than the tourists in their revelations. The most common answer given by the tourists, which accounted for about one third of that group, was that they admired Presley's musical talents. Recall that only a minority of pilgrims gave that same response. Other significant answers uttered by the tourists were not mentioned by the pilgrims. These were: nostalgia (18%), historic figure (8%) and tragedy (6%).

Elvis Presley was different things to different people. The singer exerted tremendous influence over the lives of the immigrant pilgrims in particular. These people have adopted his home town as their own. On the other hand, to the majority of the respondents in this study, Elvis was important enough for them to visit his home,

but then only enough to stay for a few hours. This suggested to me that perception was a key variable.

Although it could be argued that media hype created Elvis Presley, this does not adequately explain why some people were totally enraptured by him, whereas others only had passing interest in him. It is more reasonable to suggest that media images are accepted or rejected based on the needs and interests of the viewer. Furthermore, it is very unlikely that anybody living today has not been continually exposed to Elvis Presley, and thus in a sense everybody saw the same man, and yet in a deeper sense we did not.

If the significance of Elvis was based on perception, then this would suggest that the meaning of Graceland and the experiences of that place were a function of those same interpretations. In other words, if Presley, based entirely on his own merits, prompted his followers to make a pilgrimage to his home, then why were those people vastly outnumbered in that place? Ideally, everyone visiting Graceland should have had pilgrim tendencies.

Because Graceland was visited by people from all over the world, the possibility existed that these different types of Presley fans reflect different cultures. In general, the range of meanings assigned to the late singer by the 209 respondents did not notably differ by place of origin. However, there were some noteworthy differences based on the proportion of people who gave a particular response. Of those places which were represented in the sample, people from the New England States were the least enthusiastic about

Presley. The people from this district either lacked an interest in the singer or considered him a great singer or nostalgic figure and ignored the human element. Although even one of the pilgrims hailed from New England, this person focused on the man's musical side and ignored the human element. New Englanders have been by tradition conservative about everything in life. By contrast, nobody from Canada or England was ambivalent toward Presley. Furthermore, a proportionately higher number of respondents from Canada and England displayed an admiration of Presley's human attributes than the norm. Place of origin was a factor in the interpretation of Elvis, but the range of responses within a particular region were more pronounced.

Let us turn next to the meanings and experiences of Memphis sites associated with Presley. That is, what was it about those places which is alluring to the devout Elvis Presley fan?

### Graceland

#### Meaning

Just as a diversity of meanings were assigned to Elvis Presley, the significance of his mansion also varied tremendously (Figures 5.2 - 5.3).

Associates of Elvis Presley were not in awe of Graceland. To them, it had been their home which they shared with a dear friend for several years. A member of Elvis's band, who did not wish to be



Figure 5.2 Graceland.



Figure 5.3 A view of the grounds behind the house.

identified, explained that other houses which Presley and his friends occupied while they were in Hollywood were also important, but Graceland was where they were rooted. Billy Smith recalled with excitement,

Elvis and I were just a couple of poor ol' Mississippi boys... [When I was invited to live in a house behind Graceland] it was like moving into heaven...will always be home.

Richard Davis, Presley's valet, commented that Graceland represented ten years of things that he and the singer did together. Although the inhabitants of the mansion were allowed to continue living there after the singer's death, only Elvis's grandmother, Minnie Mae Presley, and his paternal aunt, Delta Mae Biggs chose to remain there. Elvis was central to the meaning of Graceland to those who knew him personally. Presley was their friend and a dynamic individual whom they all admired. When Elvis died their lives were jolted. Billy Smith stated sadly,

I couldn't stand it there after Elvis died... there were too many memories. I had to get away. I packed my bags and stayed away for a couple of years... I came back to Memphis because I belong here.

The immigrant pilgrims considered Graceland to be the most important place on earth. Dennis Wise stated,

If there is a heart of the world it's Graceland... much more love in the world here than anywhere else...people help each other out.



A very similar statement was made by another young man

I always wanted to move to Memphis...like I was always meant to be here...sometimes saddened that the man is not here. His spirit is, you can feel it! Graceland could be the heart of the world... love is generated so much. If you're around enough, it can really touch you.

The immigrant pilgrims considered Graceland to be much more precious than their own homes, which they left behind. These people did not have familial ties to bond them to their former residences. Feelings of isolation were alleviated by moving to Memphis because Graceland attracted other people who were equally committed to Presley. Graceland symbolized feelings of love and association with other people. Fraternal bonds were embodied in the phrase, "Elvis fans can move mountains." Moreover, the sentiment was expressed that because everybody loved Elvis, anyone who loved Elvis would also be loved. For most immigrant pilgrims the Presley mansion was not just a meeting place, but also the domain of their hero's spirit.

In contrast to the immigrant pilgrims, the transient pilgrims tended not to share the view that Graceland was the center of the planet earth. Unlike the immigrant pilgrims who were in need of a surrogate home, the lives of these people were based elsewhere in their occupations and/or families. However, a few individuals made statements such as, "to me, coming to Graceland is like coming home." Although the transient pilgrims did not identify with the mansion quite as closely as the immigrant pilgrims, they did consider Elvis's home to be an extremely important and electrifying place. By

journeying to Graceland the people in this group gained a sense of closeness to their hero. A woman from Barrie, Ontario, stated:

It's him, his home...I never saw him live in concert. That's the closest I'll ever get to him. By being here I can get a feel of what it was like when he was alive.

Graceland was loved by Elvis, and thus it was loved by both immigrant and transient pilgrims. The home was also a major physical remnant of Presley's life -- a life which the pilgrims needed to know more about. There was also some evidence to suggest that the precise meaning which was ascribed to Graceland was linked to an individual's religious background. One person stated, "Graceland is the closest we can get to him until we die and go to heaven with him." A second person declared, "I don't care about going anywhere else...He's still in that house [in a spiritual sense]." For the majority of transient pilgrims Graceland was physical space, but for others it had a very pronounced spiritual dimension. In general, the transient pilgrims differed from those pilgrims who now live in Memphis because the latter internalized Elvis's own religious beliefs that spirits roam on earth.

The tourist population substantiated the concept that a place can be assigned vastly different meanings. Although the pilgrims placed great importance on Graceland, roughly one third of the tourists stated that Presley's home was devoid of any meaning. As an illustration, one respondent said that his visit to Graceland was "just an opportunity to stop...wouldn't want to go through Memphis

without stopping...not truthfully an Elvis fan." What was "just" another tourist attraction" to some people was very much an integral part of the lives of the immigrant pilgrims, in particular. An additional one tenth of the tourists were neutral toward Graceland. Those people saw the Presley mansion as "the home of a famous star" or "the symbol of a bygone era in music." In other words, meanings placed on Elvis did not necessarily carry over to his home. It should be noted that one quarter of those people who showed little if any concern about Graceland also lacked interest in Elvis Presley.

Respondents who indicated that the mansion did have meaning for them -- recall that the entire sample was comprised of both transient pilgrims and tourists -- can be separated into two groups based on the intensity of their statements. The first group, which only included tourists, assigned rather superficial meanings to Graceland. One quarter of this group stated that it was "Elvis's home." An equal number of people were accounted for by two other responses. First, Graceland was a memorial to the late singer, and second, it was symbolic of his importance. A seventy year old man, who did not consider himself to be an Elvis fan stated,

Yeah, it does have meaning...I saw all those periods in music...I just came to see the gate because I heard so much about it...when I saw all the stuff for \$10.00, [I could not resist taking the tour]...The local people don't know what's here. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Although the answers supplied by this group were similar to those given by people who were neutral toward Graceland, the underlying

meanings differed. The second group, comprised of both pilgrims and tourists, considered Graceland to be very significant in their lives. Graceland was cherished by this group because it was there that they could feel Elvis's presence, and gained a sense of continuity in their lives because Graceland has endured in a changing world.

In short, the vast majority of people visiting Graceland were not there as pilgrims, but rather as curiosity seekers. The home attracted people who had only casual interest in Presley and devoted fans who did not place any real meaning on the externalities of the singer's life. However, there were many Elvis fans who visited Graceland because of the sanctity of that place. That is, many different Gracelands existed within the minds of its visitors.

#### Experience of Place

It was pointed out in the preceding sections that people visited Graceland for a variety of reasons and assigned a diversity of meanings to that place and its former occupant. Experiences inside the Presley mansion also varied among patrons (Figures 5.4 - 5.7). By examining these experiences we gain further insights into the varying degrees of importance about being in that place.

Approximately one fifth of the transient pilgrims and one third of the tourists focused on the physical aspects of the dwelling. Some of these people expressed that wealth and beauty were exuded by the mansion. A man from Fort Worth, Texas stated,



Figure 5.4 The dining room.



Figure 5.5 Looking through the living room into the music room.

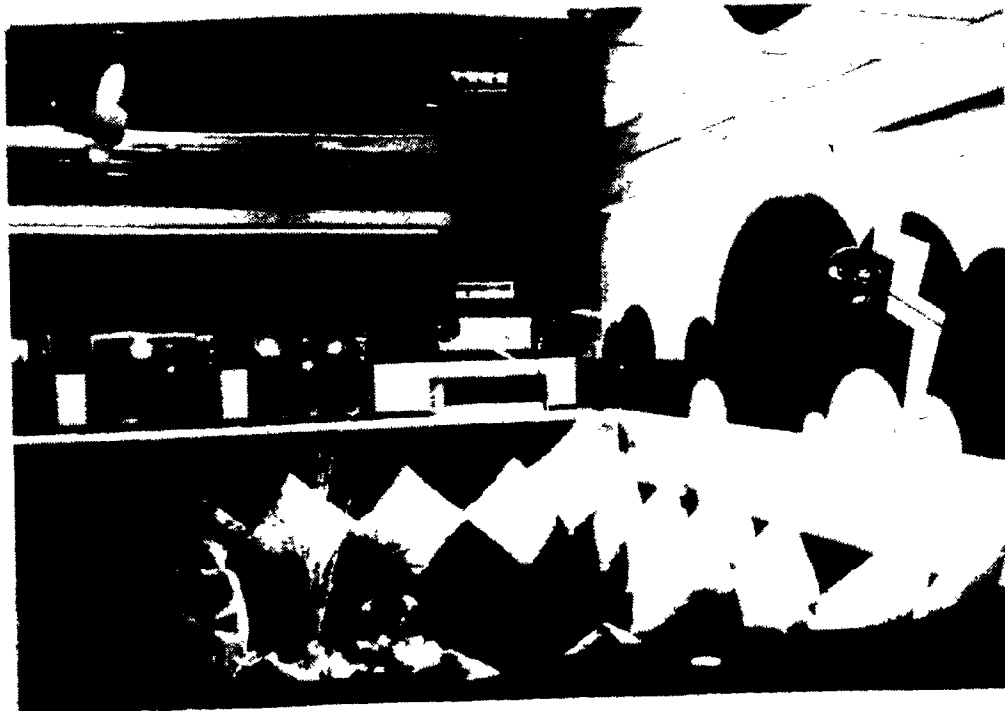


Figure 5.6 The TV room.



Figure 5.7 Mementos from the singer's personal life -- one of the displays in the trophy building.

I can't visualize anyone having enough money to buy anything he wanted...fabulous taste...I'm sure he enjoyed living.

Other people were less than impressed with Presley's taste in home furnishings. A statement by a young woman from Ann Arbor, Michigan exemplified this point,

His taste was pretty bad...I don't know that much about him...The tour educated me. I enjoyed it.

Both people quoted here placed relatively little importance on Elvis Presley, and yet what they saw inside Graceland was greatly polarized. Transient pilgrims who concentrated on the aesthetic aspects of the home while they were touring through it, tended to be extremely pleased with what they saw. A commonly uttered phrase by the transient pilgrims was, "you just can't get enough of it. Each time that you go through you notice something different." In other words, by continually viewing the relics of their hero's life, the transient pilgrims were of the opinion that the secrets of his existence would gradually be unfolded to them.

Emotional experiences inside the home were reported by one quarter of the tourists and one third of the transient pilgrims. Although sadness was the predominant environmental response of these people, a number of individuals felt honored, happy or excited to actually be inside Elvis Presley's home. A female pilgrim from New York experienced a range of emotions.

It was overwhelming...my hands were shaking...too much of an emotional thing to take pictures. [After

seeing the video of Elvis which was shown in the racketball building, I felt like he's back...at the grave it's reality again.

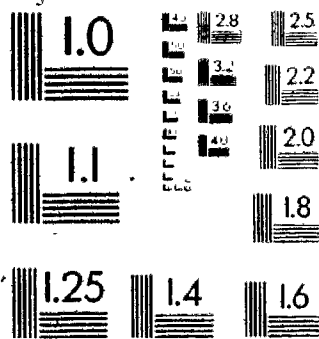
Because many people were not moved by Graceland, it can be concluded that emotional experiences or responses originated within the individual rather than being an instinctive reaction to one's own environment.

In the previous subsection I began to point out that one quarter of the transient pilgrims, as well as the immigrant pilgrims assigned meaning to Graceland because they were able to feel close to Presley there. One third of those people who considered Elvis as a friend, even though they never actually met him, stated that they had spiritual encounters inside the house. An immigrant pilgrim indicated that she acquired a photograph in which Elvis's ghost was plainly visible and seated on the living room sofa. "I have a feeling he's still here...I believe in a hereafter. I believe he'll always be here," exclaimed a woman from England. Belief in Presley's spiritual existence did not necessarily mean that his ghost would be felt within the house itself. People who experienced him at the grave site or elsewhere on the estate, did not necessarily indicate that Elvis was inside the mansion. An interesting graffito was written on the brick wall which surrounds the Presley property. It read,

I know you're up there smiling down on all of us.  
Edith sends her love and knows you'll be there on  
her wedding day.



2



This also indicated that some people made a pilgrimage to Memphis because the soul of the person who they revered was there, and thus there existed feelings of love and mutual understanding with him. Because Elvis's spirit made itself known to only a relative few of those people who remained loyal, and the precise nature and location of these revelations varied between individuals, this again suggested to me the role of perception in interpreting the landscape. The existence of Elvis Presley's ghost cannot be disproven even though the majority of respondents were oblivious to it. That is, Presley's ghost was very-real to those people who experienced it. The majority of people who felt close to him inside the mansion did not report spiritual confrontations. Two common responses given by these people were, "It gives me the chills to know that he once lived here" and "It's a thrill to be able to walk where he once walked."

The tours through the mansion were viewed unfavorably by the immigrant pilgrims. That is, because Graceland was sacred space to those people, they resented its commercial exploitation. The immigrant pilgrims believed that tourists should not have been allowed inside the Presley home and that the managers of the mansion had largely ignored the singer in their promotional schemes. One young man stated,

Graceland [Enterprises] is pushing Graceland. They don't care about Elvis. People are here to see Elvis. If it wasn't for him people wouldn't be coming to see Graceland...look-at all the stuff

they're selling with just Graceland's name on it.  
The fans want Elvis!

Two important points are reiterated by this quote. First, Graceland would have been nothing without its associational link with Elvis, and because that link did exist the house was sacred. Second, the sacredness of Graceland dictated that the home should be treated with respect. Living and working in the vicinity of the mansion enabled the immigrant pilgrims to monitor any ill proceedings there.

A small minority of both transient pilgrim and tourist groups shared the opinion of the immigrant pilgrims that their presence in the Presley mansion was a tremendous invasion of privacy. A tourist from Trenton, Ontario commented,

It is pretty crummy showing a dead man's house...  
just leave it alone...like Christmas, it is much too  
commercialized.

Transient pilgrims who felt like intruders in the home, generally wanted the house closed to tours, and to be given back the privilege of walking up the driveway leading into the estate rather than riding on a sterile tour bus. Recall that other transient pilgrims were ecstatic after having toured through Graceland. A few of those individuals exclaimed that they wanted to see even more of the mansion than was integrated into the tour.

The data suggested to me that people visited Graceland for vastly different reasons. The majority of people wished to have a tourist experience, whereas others wanted to feel physically or

spiritually closer to their hero. Divergent experiences inside the Presley mansion revealed that a site could be different things to different people. If one person was very moved by environmental stimuli while many others did not share this experience with him or her, the experience was nevertheless valid. In general, people experienced different things in the same environment because they assigned different meanings to that place.

But was Graceland what people actually anticipated?

#### Expectation Versus Reality

When people visit a place they generally arrive with certain expectations which they would like to have fulfilled. In the case of Graceland, only one fifth of the pilgrims and one tenth of the tourists found the physical attributes they were looking for.

For nearly one half of both tourists and pilgrims, the Presley mansion was much more modest than they had previously imagined. The most significant aspect of the mansion which these people focused on was its size. Graceland was seen as being much smaller than the stereotyped home of a celebrity. A much less frequent response was that they were disappointed with its furnishings. A female school teacher who made a pilgrimage from Pennsylvania explained,

I expected Graceland to be much bigger...to be unreachable, like a place you'd never go into... [When I was growing up] I never dreamed of going inside. [Even when I started coming to Memphis after Elvis died] I never thought that I would one day walk through those doors. The dream was

impossible to fulfill.

A few of the aforementioned respondents had also anticipated that it was in a remote area rather than on a commercial strip (Figures 5.8 - 5.9).

To one fifth of the pilgrims and one tenth of the tourists, the mansion was much more than they had anticipated. An elderly female tourist from New Jersey stated,

It was out of this world...a really spectacular house...a lot more than I expected...I could almost picture him in it.

Finally, roughly one tenth of both tourists and pilgrims did not have specific preconceived notions. It should be noted that the underlying intentions of the people who gave this response differed. While the pilgrims considered the mansion as something very mysterious and exciting before they went inside, the tourists indicated that they had not previously pondered about what Graceland was really like.

This kind of information is valuable because it points out the role of the imagination in travel decisions. Tourists may have visited Graceland because they expected to see a beautiful home. However, unlike a resort community where one seeks amenities such as sand and surf, Graceland or at least Presley has been assigned meaning by countless numbers of people throughout the world. Graceland was his life. There was no intervening opportunity related to Presley that could have better told his story. If meanings were



Figure 5.8 A view of the souvenir shops, the Lisa Marie airplane and ticket area.



Figure 5.9 Looking south down Elvis Presley Boulevard. Graceland was out in the country when Elvis purchased it. Memphis grew around it.

bestowed on Graceland it was not because it was a mansion, but rather that it was the beloved home of someone who had been deemed to be important. In other words, the structural attributes of Graceland did not affect the meanings assigned to the home. The key variable was Elvis Presley.

### Discussion

This subsection provides a brief integration of the material relating to the meanings, experiences and expectations of the Presley mansion. In general, the meaning of Graceland was a function of the degree of significance placed on Elvis Presley. However, there were people who were very enthusiastic about Elvis, but they did not place any real importance on his mansion, and vice versa. For persons who did not particularly like him, their presence at the Presley home was based on their curiosity about why other people were there. Next, what a particular individual experienced inside the house depended upon the meanings assigned to Presley and Graceland. The expectations which people had about the mansion's physical appearance also varied substantially, but these differences were not delineated along any kind of Presley-related variable. There was evidence to suggest that place of origin influenced the expectations which people had upon their arrival at Graceland. For example, a few individuals from England thought that they would find a castle, whereas people from the poorer areas of the United States, such as Mississippi, did not

have such high expectations. Finally, the important thing to consider is not what the individual saw, but rather how stimuli were interpreted by that person. That is, what meaning, if any, was assigned to that place, and what satisfactions or experiences could be derived from being there?

Next, let us consider another place, Presley's grave.

#### Meditation Gardens

Like the mansion, the importance of Presley's grave site varied among individuals (Figures 1.1-1.2). One fifth of the pilgrims and a few other respondents were ecstatic to actually be at his grave. For example, a male tourist who viewed Presley as a tragic figure stated,

Meditation Gardens looked and felt nice...I enjoyed that the most because it's the closest you can get to him physically. That was the beauty of it...[I prefer classical music. I wonder how I would react at the graves of some of those great men?]

A substantial portion of these respondents felt Elvis's presence at the grave. Some floral arrangements placed near the grave would substantiate this point. One of these tributes read as follows:

You have been part of our lives. We will continue to love you for all eternity and do good works in your name, always trying to tell people about all the talent and goodness you possess.

Although that statement had strong religious connotations, pilgrims who expressed their involvement in projects dedicated to Presley had



been doing so to demonstrate the singer's philosophy of giving to others, rather than as a form of idolatry. Even though Elvis is physically dead, he was very real to them, and thus they wanted to express their undying admiration by perpetrating his good name. In a very true sense they were his disciples, but they never lost sight of their leader's now famous proclamations, "There's only one king and that's Jesus Christ...I'm just an entertainer, and that's that." As in the case of the mansion, the people who experienced his spirit in Meditation Gardens were among those who had very very deep emotional ties with him.

One half of both the tourist and pilgrim groups reported that they had emotional experiences at the grave. A pilgrim who journeyed from England stated,

Being Catholic I feel I must go to the grave...very emotional for me...I might as well say I have met him...been a fan since he first appeared on the scene.

It should be noted that the vast majority of respondents who were neutral toward Elvis Presley did feel sad at his grave. These people made statements such as, "a wasted life" and "it was a bitter reminder of my own lost youth." This suggested to me that the casual tourist felt sad when he or she came upon Presley's grave, whereas for someone who was much more involved in the singer's life visiting the grave was a very meaningful experience from the outset of his or her journey

In contrast, one tenth of the tourists and a similar proportion

of the transient pilgrims were unmoved by Meditation Gardens. Two common responses uttered by the tourists in question were, "it's just another grave to me" and "I was not aware that he was buried there...just interested to see the house." To the transient pilgrims, the grave marker was little more than a memorial because they believed that Elvis was buried elsewhere on the estate. One such woman stated,

I enjoy spending time in Meditation Gardens. It's a beautiful spot but it really doesn't mean very much because he is not really buried there. They wouldn't leave his body unguarded like that when there are so many people around...He's buried in an unmarked location somewhere on the estate where he can be at peace.

While the vast majority of pilgrims regarded Meditation Gardens as sacred space, a few such individuals cherished what was to them Elvis's true grave site.

Finally, one tenth of the tourists responded that Presley's grave site was too commercialized. A statement which captured this sentiment was, "he had to die to escape the public...he'll never be in peace as long as they're here." The pilgrims' attitudes with respect to this issue did not come out in the interviews. However, their observed behaviors indicated to me that it was very much a matter of concern.

The remainder of this section focuses on my field observations at the grave site.

Between 9:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. Meditation Gardens was the final

exhibit on the mansion tours. During that period people lined up quietly to see the graves of Elvis and his family. The vast majority stood respectfully at the foot of Elvis's final resting place for a few moments and then proceeded to the van area to be shuttled off the property (Figure 5.10). When nearly everyone had gone, a new group of people came from the racketball building. Throughout my field research small children were observed on occasion to be more fascinated with the large water fountain in the center of Meditation Gardens than with the grave (Figure 5.11). To them the thousands of shiny coins beneath the vertical streams of water were undoubtedly much more alluring than the grave of somebody who died before they were even born. A limited number of people dropped cigarette butts on the ground each day, which would indicate a lack of respect for the grave among those individuals. The behaviors discussed here did not change during the week surrounding the seventh anniversary of Presley's death because the tourists still overshadowed the pilgrims at that time.

During the early morning visitation period, before the 9:00 A.M. tours began, two vastly different Meditation Gardens were created. Until 7 August tourist behaviors, such as picture taking and coin tossing, predominated during that part of the day. However, there were a few people who sat quietly on the steps near the foot of the grave (Figure 5.12). Most notably, two women from Europe arrived at Meditation Gardens at precisely 6:50 A.M. each morning and stayed for the remaining forty minutes of the visitation period. They were in



Figure 5.10 Tourists standing at the foot of the Presley family graves, 9 August 1984.

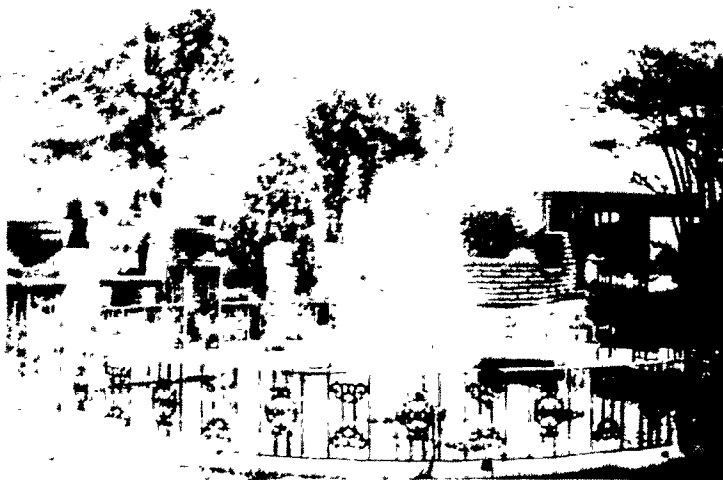


Figure 5.11 A small girl looking into the fountain in Meditation Gardens. The racketball building is in the background.

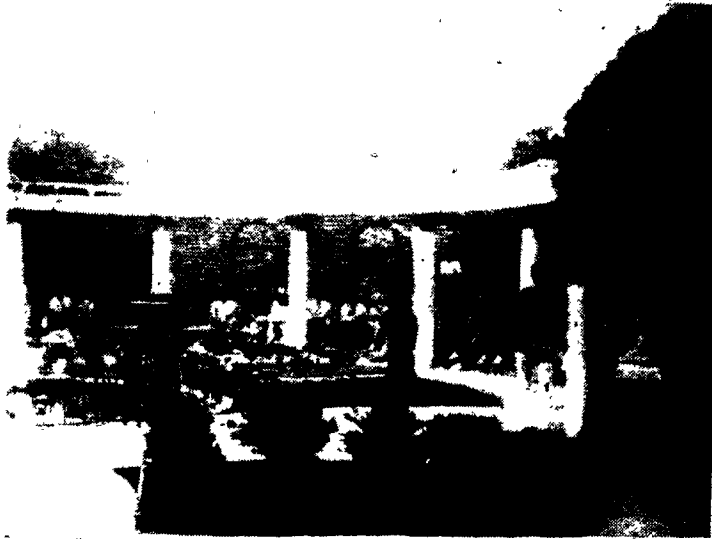


Figure 5.12 A group of devotees, 7:00 A.M., 12 August 1984.



Figure 5.13 Presley fans waiting for the front gates to open, 6:30 A.M., 15 August 1984.

Memphis for the entire duration of my field research. Because they seldom spoke or took photographs their behavior indicated to me that they had great respect for Elvis and cherished the peaceful moments which they could spend at his grave. Never dissuaded from keeping their daily vigil, these women seemed almost oblivious to the weather and the antics of some of the tourists. That is, the beauty, tranquility and sanctity which the two women assigned to Meditation Gardens were largely unknown to the tourists who were present during that time period.

When the pilgrims began arriving in Memphis for the festival week, the behavior exhibited by the two European women in Meditation Gardens became the norm rather than the exception. The number of people who kept an early morning vigil at the grave gradually increased from a half dozen individuals in early August to approximately three hundred people on the day prior to the anniversary of Elvis's death. Several people brought elaborate handmade floral arrangements on 16 August. Personal sources indicated that some of these projects were a year in the making. A kite which was presented by one oriental woman and a detailed replica of Presley's private airplane, set in a background of clouds, symbolized life. In contrast, the creator of another floral tribute stated in an interview, "Elvis is dead and that's it." In other words, similar overt behaviors at the grave site and comparable levels of commitment to Presley did not necessarily predict the same kinds of experiences. Floral tributes were set in place in a very

sincere and meticulous manner. Somewhat similarly, on 9 August people who had been sitting in Meditation Gardens helped to place flowers back on the grave after the yard men cut the grass. Earlier that morning a woman from Toronto, Ontario, commenced picking up litter which was strewn around the grave yard. These kinds of behaviors exemplified the sanctity of that place to the people under consideration. Prior to the influx of pilgrims, visitors were not observed taking flowers to the grave, nor did anyone kiss the commemorative plaque. Those were actions of the devout followers. Finally, the vast majority of pilgrims arrived at the front gates of Graceland at least fifteen minutes before the visitation period commenced and were rather reluctant to leave at its conclusion (Figure 5.13). It was a very special time for them. Two days, in particular, were very emotional. These were the anniversary of Elvis's death, on 16 August, and 19 August when everyone was preparing to leave for home.

Pilgrims were very visible in Meditation Gardens during the early part of the morning because of their behavior and dress. Prior to the influx of pilgrims in mid August, personal sources had indicated that some people would spend an entire day at the grave. However, I did not observe this. A small group of women did sit at the grave for roughly one half hour during the tour hours, but they promptly left after they were interviewed for television. Although these women may have welcomed the opportunity to vocalize their feelings for Elvis, the cameras had also invaded their sacred space.

Another woman, who wished to spend some time at the grave one afternoon, was upset by the behavior of the tourists. She stated,

This morning [at the pilgrims' vigil] everybody understood what everybody else felt. When I was there during the tour a little kid said, "Mommy, is Elvis dead?" I didn't like that.

Although the pilgrims wished to visit Presley's final resting place, they chose not to stay for more than a few moments unless the sanctity of that place was agreed upon by everyone present. Because Elvis's mansion and grave site together were a very popular tourist attraction, the pilgrims congregated on the property during the solemn hours of the morning. Another major reason why the pilgrims were noticeably absent during the tours was the availability of other Elvis related activities throughout the city. In short, the introduction of tours through the mansion's interior in 1982, and Elvis International Tribute Week the following year, dramatically altered the Memphis scene. Thus, a push-pull situation may have been in effect by 1984. The devoted Presley fan did not feel comfortable spending an entire day at the grave because of the tours, whereas the organized events throughout Memphis were undoubtedly very alluring to him or her.

In summary, a significant number of respondents reported that they were saddened by visiting the grave. However, the observation of overt behaviors revealed that the relative importance of visiting that site varied across individuals. Some people who wished to visit the home of their childhood hero were abruptly reminded of Presley's



tragic demise by seeing his grave. Other people were emotional because they had long desired to be in such close proximity to his remains or spirit. The divergent behaviors also reinforced the point that the Presley pilgrimage was based on the interpretations of its participants. To some people Meditation Gardens was sacred space, whereas to others it was devoid of any real meaning.

#### Other Sites and Events

Although the mansion and grave site were the focal points of the Presley pilgrimage, the truly devout followers were also attracted to the many other sites and activities associated with Elvis Presley, located both in the vicinity of Graceland and elsewhere in Memphis. Let us consider the meanings associated with six of these opportunities, as well as the singer's birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi.

#### Candlelight Ceremony

A highlight of the pilgrimage was the annual candlelight ceremony which was organized by the Elvis Country Fan Club from Austin, Texas. According to police estimates, it attracted five thousand people in 1984 (Commercial Appeal 17 August 1984, B1).

The services commenced at 11:00 P.M. on 15 August and lasted for approximately three hours. Opening remarks were made by one of the

leaders of the host fan club:

Memories pressed between the pages of my mind.  
Memories that Elvis the man and the music will  
always be a part of. Our memories of Elvis are  
ours to cherish forever and can never be taken  
from us. Thank you Elvis for the love, the  
music and all the memories that you gave to all  
of us.

A procession was formed inside the mansion's front gates. Two of Presley's relatives walked to the grave site and returned with small torches which were lit from the eternal flame situated at the head of the grave. In turn, all of the participants lit their candles from these torches as they walked onto the estate. The ceremony was over after everyone present had filed past Presley's final resting place. Throughout the proceedings several of Elvis's gospel recordings were broadcast.

Although the candlelight ceremony was very important to those people who participated in it, the significance of that ceremony varied among individuals. To some people the ritual symbolized eternal life. A graffito dated 16 August 1984 stated,

Memphis, Graceland, a candlelight vigil...The eternal  
flame on your gravesite still burns. As brightly as  
the flame in our hearts. But we cannot leave you to  
whatever place you found when you had to depart...  
Through Jesus and through us you shall live.

Furthermore, the emblem of the host fan club was a butterfly, a traditional symbol of renewed life. Other individuals stated that the candlelight ceremony symbolized the constant devotion of Presley fans to their fallen hero. A third theme of the candlelight ceremony

was that the event was a tribute to the man's legacy. A female pilgrim from England stated,

All the fans get together [for the procession] to prove how much they think of Elvis...[The ceremony has meaning] because it's at midnight before the sixteenth...The candles [do not really have any meaning.]

Another woman described her experience during the rite and motives for being in Memphis every year since Presley's death:

All I saw was an endless stream of candles...I said to myself, "What measure of man is he that after all these years garners this love and devotion"...[The fans are here because] we don't want people to say, "Ha, ha, you forgot him"...[We] don't do it entirely for the [public's benefit, but] at least fifty percent [of our effort is for them.]

Similarly, the speaker at the service stated,

Our torch of memories is kept aflame by proud succession. Share your sweet memories of Elvis with new and younger fans. By sharing our memories, our love, our respect for the man, the music, and the legend, we are keeping Elvis's memory alive.

Finally, a past participant in the candlelight ceremony did not take part in the service because she perceived it to have very strong religious connotations. For moral reasons this woman shifted her admiration for Elvis from his personal qualities to his musical abilities.

The candlelight ceremony, then, was a deeply personal experience for some individuals, whereas for others it was a chance to prove to the general public and to other fans their continued loyalty to

Elvis. This divergency was demonstrated by the attitudes and reactions to television and movie cameras, which were not present in previous years. For instance, before the rite began many people lit their candles for a few moments because they were requested to do so by a television producer. Other people resented the fact that the video lighting detracted from the intended solemnity of the evening. A few days later one of the immigrant pilgrims stated that she had heard rumors that movie footage of the event was spoiled. She attributed this loss to Elvis not wanting his home and fans to be exploited. In other words, Presley's ghost intervened. Two or three other individuals were overheard commenting that the candlelight ceremony should take place at Presley's birthplace in subsequent years because of the media intrusion. In one of the following subsections I will point out that Tupelo was much less important to Presley's followers than Graceland. The true significance of the ceremony was derived from the meaning of person and place -- Elvis, Graceland and Meditation Gardens. The rite could have been carried out in any number of locations. However, Elvis loved Graceland with a passion and that was where he died. Finally, the candles which the participants carried were ignited from the very flame that burned at the head of their hero's grave.

Let us move away from the events at Graceland to two displays across the street.

### Customized Bus and Jet Aircraft

Presley's 1959 Flexible VL Coach and Convair 880 jet, the Lisa Marie, attracted some attention from both the tourists and the pilgrims (Figures 1.1, 5.14 - 5.15). Relative to Graceland, the two vehicles were of only secondary importance to the visitors. In fact, none of the respondents indicated that the presence of either vehicle directly influenced his or her decision to visit Graceland. The vast majority of tourists had never even heard of the bus. In contrast, the airplane attracted substantial attention from the media in February 1984. It was at that time that the aircraft was flown for the last time and towed down Elvis Presley Boulevard accompanied by marching bands to its permanent docking area. However, many of the tourists were very surprised when they first saw the aircraft from the roadside.

The Lisa Marie stimulated a much greater interest than the bus. While the aircraft was observed to attract fifteen to twenty people to each of its tours which commenced every quarter hour, the bus was patronized by as few as one or two individuals during the same time period. People who bought a ticket to see the bus could board it without any waiting period. The bus tended to attract its clients from among those people who had just completed touring the other vehicle. Everybody who disembarked from the Lisa Marie had to walk by Elvis's bus because of the layout of the area. The bus was



Figure 5.14 Elvis Presley's private coach. The rear door and staircase were installed for public tours.



Figure 5.15 The Lisa Marie. A parking lot, the singer's bus, and the ticket area are in the background.

largely ignored because of its rather unassuming exterior and modest furnishings. On the other hand, the jet was lavishly decorated. Before Elvis had it customized, the huge airplane could seat forty passengers.

Like the mansion, grave site and candlelight ceremony, experiences within the jet and bus varied among individuals. The data did not indicate to me that an individual's experience in Presley's house carried over into the jet or bus. Furthermore, experiences within the jet and bus were not necessarily similar. Because only a small proportion of the participants in the present study had toured one or both of the vehicles at the time in which they were interviewed, detailed distinctions are not made between the frequency of responses given by transient pilgrims and tourists.

On both the jet and bus, the vast majority of people focused on the material aspects of those environments. One third of the respondents reported that they were disappointed in the bus, whereas only a small fraction of them had similar reactions to the jet. It should be pointed out that none of the transient pilgrims had negative experiences on either vehicle. The airplane's furnishings evoked awe in two-fifths of the respondents. They stated that the vehicle exuded great wealth. The bus was enjoyed for its aesthetic qualities by one fifth of its visitors, but they just found it to be "nice" or "interesting."

Several individuals, most of whom were transient pilgrims, described the moods existing within the two transportation devices.

In reference to the Lisa Marie one transient pilgrim stated, "I felt his presence." This individual believed that Elvis was omnipresent within the bounds of the Graceland tourist complex. In contrast, a second transient pilgrim stated, "it's nice to see but it's a dead airplane, like Elvis is dead." People who felt they knew Presley were much more likely to be excited or feel his presence on the airplane, and less likely to feel sad than the other visitors. On the bus, only two women had moving experiences. They were both exhilarated. The husband of one of these women described his wife's reaction, "her skin was just a-crawlin'."

Through the years Elvis Presley spent a considerable amount of time on board the two vehicles. Even though the bus and the jet were fully equipped living quarters which were used enroute to Hollywood or concert engagements, they were not nearly as meaningful as Graceland. Half of the tourists and transient pilgrims stated that they had absolutely no inclination to see the interior of the bus. A similar proportion of the tourists did not intend to tour through the Lisa Marie, whereas all but a few of the transient pilgrims intended to go on board. Some of the immigrant pilgrims shied away from the two vehicles because of time constraints. Others stayed away because Graceland Enterprises was turning the ticket area into a "circus."

The relative lack of interest in the tour bus by Elvis fans was due to two related factors. The first reason was that it was sold nine years before Presley's death, and thus was not readily associated with the late singer. The data also indicated that



because the bus was one of Presley's lesser publicized vehicles it had not been assigned any significant meaning. On the other hand, the Lisa Marie was the most famous jet in Elvis's air fleet because it was named after his only daughter. It was being readied for a concert tour just hours before the singer's death. The pilgrims considered the importance of the jet to Elvis, whereas the majority of people saw the Lisa Marie as an oddity rather than a meaningful object.

In summary, people varied from each other in their perceptions of either of the two vehicular environments. The bus did not receive much attention from the tourists because it was not nearly as impressive in its appearance as the airplane. The pilgrims could more strongly associate with the Lisa Marie than the bus because they had heard countless stories about the former and very little about the latter. Because the importance of the airplane to devout Presley followers was tremendously overshadowed by the mansion, this suggested to me that meanings were not just arbitrarily assigned to just anything even remotely associated with the hero's life. The devotees emphasized many of the same things that Elvis did. Graceland was of prime importance to the singer. The grave site was equally important to the pilgrims because the physical remnants of their hero were buried there.

Next we will consider two other Presley-related sites in Memphis.

### Humes High School and American Sound Studio

Humes High School and American Sound Studio both played key roles in the life of Elvis Presley (Figures 2, 5.16 - 5.17). When Elvis entered high school in 1949 he simply blended into the crowd. Two years later he dared to be different. It was then that he adopted the wild style of dress, long sideburns and long greasy hairdo which he popularized a few years after graduation. During his final year at Humes High School, Presley participated in a talent show. It was then that he won the attention and admiration of his peers (Lichter 1978, 9-10). Sixteen years after Elvis graduated from high school he entered the doors of American Sound Studio. The two gold albums and six gold singles which he recorded there helped to revitalize public interest in the singer at a time when his motion picture career was rapidly waning (Worth and Tamerius 1981, 9).

Despite the importance of Humes High School and American Sound Studio in Presley's life, neither of these places were popular attractions in Memphis. Only people with a very intense interest in the singer knew about such places and sought them out. Both the recording studio and high school attracted the vast majority of their visitors during Elvis International Tribute Week.

While only a few individuals were present in either location during my observation period, they exhibited a great deal of enthusiasm. In fact, people's reactions to the recording studio and high school were very similar. The most blatant example centered

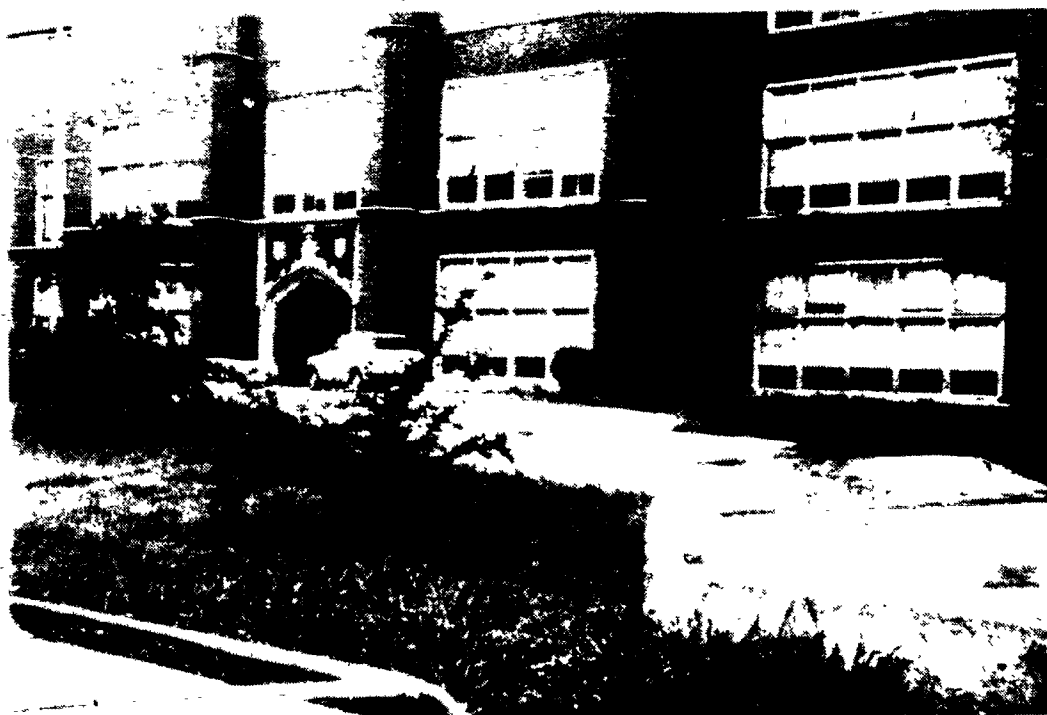


Figure 5.16 Humes High School, 659 N. Manasas Street.



Figure 5.17 American Sound Studio, 827 Thomas Street.

around the washroom facilities. At American Sound Studio, a man said to his wife upon his return from that room, "you might as well go...he went in there." Similarly, at Humes High School a woman from Niagara Falls, Ontario, wanted to get a photograph of one of the men's rooms because Elvis may have been there at some point while he was a student. These two cases suggested to me that people wanted reassurances that Elvis was once a living breathing human being, who was not much different than themselves. At the high school, people were disappointed that the specific classrooms in which Presley studied were unknown. Bill Glore, present owner of American Sound Studio, placed replicas of Elvis in the two spots where the singer stood to record. Those markers generated considerable attention from the visitors. While an entire room at the recording studio was filled with Elvis memorabilia, nothing permanent was established at the high school in Presley's honor. People were looking for a lasting tribute to their hero rather than exhibits which were to be torn down at the end of the summer.

In general, devoted Elvis fans considered places like Humes High School and American Sound Studio as nice points of interest because they were pages from the singer's life. People tended to be attracted to sites having living elements. American Sound Studio was popular among the pilgrim groups because the owner understood their feelings toward Elvis and was very much a fan of the late singer. Humes High School was chosen by the International Federation of Elvis Presley Fan Clubs as the location for its fourth annual auction to

benefit the Elvis Presley Memorial Trauma Center. The auction was held 15 August 1984. Because the school is situated in what is now a tough black neighborhood, this was a strong indication that the building offered no other amenity than being Elvis's alma mater. In contrast, Sun Studio, where Presley began his recording career, did not generate much interest because of its sterile atmosphere and relative lack of exhibits.

In summary, Humes High School and American Sound Studio were important places in the life of Elvis Presley. While the vast majority of visitors to Memphis lacked knowledge of or interest in these kinds of attractions, they were quite important to a significant minority. People who visited those places wanted to discover something about their hero just like they did at Graceland. However no other location in Memphis was assigned as much meaning as the grave site and mansion. Finally, the data suggested to me that what separated the Lisa Marie from places like American Sound Studio in the minds of the tourists was the former's close proximity to the mansion.

In the next subsection let us consider places in Memphis which, although of no importance in Elvis's life, are sites of assembly of his loyal fans.

### Graceland Area Hotels

Six hotels in the vicinity of Graceland played an extremely vital role in the pilgrimage because they provided facilities for various activities related to the entertainer during Elvis International Tribute Week (Figure 2). Each of these events accentuated some facet of Presley's persona. Recall that devout followers viewed him as a very generous man. A charity auction was held on 14 August in the lobby of the Airport Motor Inn. Proceeds went to the Lebonheur Children's Medical Center, an institution which received several donations from Elvis during his lifetime. At the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge a fan festival was held for three days to raise money for the Elvis Presley Memorial Trauma Center. A few individuals mentioned that they continually raise money in Elvis's name by holding dances in their home communities, but that a much more special feeling was generated by similar events held in Memphis. Presley's intense religiosity was recognized at the Living Stream Prayer Circle Breakfast, which was held in his honor on the anniversary of his death, at Howard Johnson's. The organizers of this event looked upon Elvis as a model Christian. They hoped that his religious commitment would serve to win others to Christianity. Finally, Elvis's musical talent was honored at the Hilton Inn during a banquet held by the Elvis Presley International Memorial Foundation.

A very special atmosphere existed at the Days Inn during the week of commemorative celebrations. Aside from Graceland, this was

"the place to be." Each year since 1977 Presley fans have occupied all of the rooms overlooking the courtyard of this hotel and decorated their windows with coloured lights and photographs of their hero. The result of their efforts was a mindboggling collage. In 1984 a huge party surrounded the judging of the window presentations. An estimated 2,000 people wandered around the hotel looking at the windows and making new friends. Electricity filled the air. It was just like Christmas! This intense excitement was generated because the entire crowd loved Elvis.

An important aspect of the Days Inn party and the Presley pilgrimage was camaraderie. Several people who were staying at the hotel had their doors open to welcome any Elvis fan to come and share their experiences. Many individuals indicated that this open door policy persisted throughout the week at Days Inn. Elvis served as the foundation for new friendships because he was a common interest to both parties. Because of this common bond, language was not a barrier, and cultural differences accentuated the universal appeal of Elvis (Brock 1979, 121). A common expression during the festival week was, "only Elvis could bring together as many people from around the world." That is, the gathering of Presley fans in Memphis was much more than a convention. It was a meeting of kindred spirits. Many of the conversations at the Days Inn party seemed to progress beyond Elvis to include other interests such as photography. When Elvis was discussed, people wanted to hear a new story about the singer to gain further insights into his personality. Associates of

Presley who were present at this and other functions were revered to some extent because they knew the inside story. They reconfirmed to the pilgrims that Elvis Presley was a very special person, who cared about his fans. In the section dealing with the importance of the singer, I stated that many people were drawn to him because of his humility and concern for others. People who looked to Elvis as a surrogate friend gained positive feedback from that relationship through his associates.

In summary, devoted fans traveled to Memphis not only to visit Graceland, but also to pay tribute to Elvis and share their experiences about the singer with people who also placed great importance on him. These activities and conversations were cherished by the participants because of the location, Memphis. Days Inn was a very popular place to stay because of the opportunity to visually express one's devotion to Elvis through the window displays, and the assurance that other fans would be present in great numbers. Days Inn was very much a Presley community during the festival week.

Because the pilgrims were in Memphis at the same time and communed with each other, they were able to delineate the boundaries of their group. Some pilgrims were adamant in professing that if somebody did not have a vast knowledge of Presley's personal life and career, then that person was "not an Elvis fan." Because many of the events during Elvis International Tribute Week were originated by fans living outside of Memphis, they were in fact shaping that environment to which they were drawn. In other words, the contributions of those



people enhanced the attractiveness of an already meaningful environment.

Finally, we will look at a non-Memphis site, Presley's birthplace.

#### Tupelo, Mississippi

Throughout this chapter I have indicated that the meanings which were bestowed upon Elvis and related attractions in Memphis varied among individuals. Graceland was the place in his life which received the most attention by visitors to the city because he lived and died in that house. Accordingly, the place of Elvis's birth should have been equally important because it was there that he had his humble beginnings (Figure 5.18). However, I did not find evidence of this among those people that I interviewed in Memphis.

A strong majority of respondents in the present study lacked interest in visiting Tupelo. One fifth of the pilgrims and one third of the tourists chose to visit the mansion rather than the birthplace because the former was much more publicized. A female tourist explained,

I didn't know [that Elvis] existed until he came on "The Ed Sullivan Show"...Memphis is the town that has always been related to Elvis.

It was Graceland, not Tupelo, that captured the imaginations of these people. Elvis, the celebrity, lived almost his entire life at

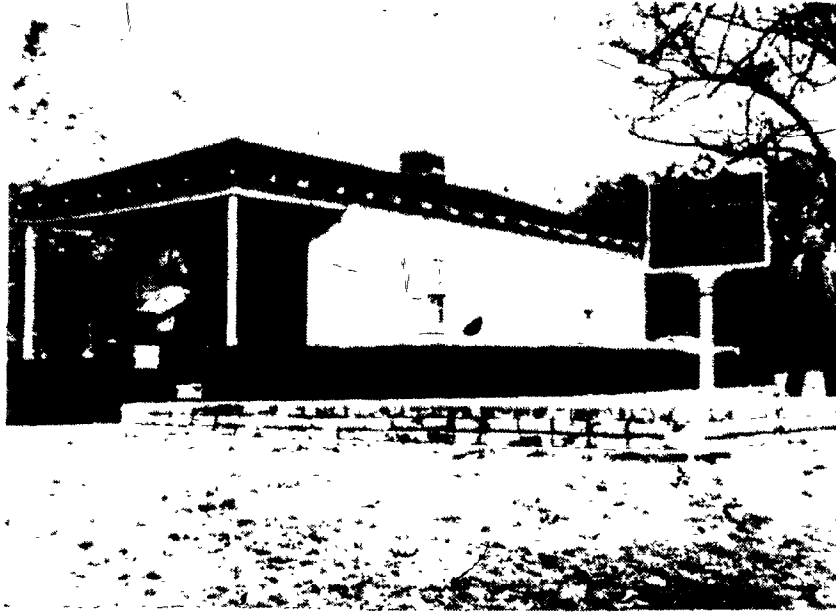


Figure 5.18 Elvis Presley's birthplace was opened to the public in June 1971.

Graceland. An additional one fifth of the pilgrims and a few of the tourists did not travel to Mississippi because "he was raised in Memphis...Where you are raised is the important part of life. You can be born anywhere." One tenth of the tourists did not know where the singer was born. In fact, those people did not have any interest in the singer. If they found Graceland to be attractive it was not because of Elvis, but rather because of the home's aesthetic qualities. Finally, one quarter of the tourists had quite simply never given the matter any thought.

For those people who planned on visiting both Graceland and Elvis's birthplace, the decision to visit the latter was most usually related to strong meanings placed on both Elvis and Graceland. We have just seen that a keen interest in Presley and his mansion did not preclude a visit to Tupelo. It seemed to me that attitudes toward Tupelo, like other sites related to the singer, were based on the individual's decision about what was important. A profound divergency in opinion existed between two of the immigrant pilgrims. One of them stated,

[The meaning of Tupelo] is the same as Graceland... That's where his roots were...He was a Mississippi boy...He never forgot where he came from. Memphis is where he chose to live...This is where [his spirit] is.

The decision of this man to move to Memphis rather than Tupelo was largely based on his firm belief that Elvis's ghost still occupied Graceland. In contrast, the second immigrant pilgrim stated,

Tupelo is not in the same category as Graceland...  
Most [people] don't remember [that] Elvis [was  
born] in Tupelo...Most fans don't think about Tupelo  
that much.

The immigrant pilgrims mentioned here have not gained similar perspectives about Tupelo even though they worked closely together and revered Elvis highly. More importantly, they disagreed about a central aspect of the singer's identity -- his roots. One of the immigrant pilgrims viewed him as a Mississippian, whereas the other saw him as a Memphisite. Three fifths of the pilgrims and a few of the tourists demonstrated more than a casual interest in Tupelo. In general, they viewed that place as a memorial or the beginnings of their hero. Only a few individuals placed it on the same plane as Graceland.

In summary, Presley's birthplace was not nearly as important as Graceland to the majority of respondents in my study. Because Elvis moved to Memphis when he was thirteen years of age, most people tended to associate him with that city rather than the place of his birth. During the latter years of his life, Presley did return to Mississippi on occasion. However, Graceland was where he longed to be after spending months in Hollywood or Las Vegas. Further study is needed to examine the entire clientele of the Mississippi home. To what extent is it a tourist or pilgrim population? The information which I collected placed Tupelo in the same special interest category as American Sound Studio.

Let us, then, ponder the general importance of the secondary

activities.

Although many pilgrims stated that Memphis would continue to be an important destination for them even if the crowds there substantially dropped, commemorative events and other points of interest associated with Elvis Presley were a significant part of the pilgrimage. Elvis and Graceland were the foci of the pilgrimage, but a significant amount of time was spent at other sites. Aside from the early morning vigil at Meditation Gardens and the candlelight ceremony, the presence of the pilgrims was most pronounced away from Graceland.

The secondary Presley attractions showed some common elements. First, the devotees gathered together during the month of August to perpetuate his memory. Places such as American Sound Studio provided them with increased knowledge about their hero. That is, people could visually interpret Elvis's story from various elements in these environments. However the pilgrims wanted to be more than passive observers. Events such as the candlelight ceremony and charity drives provided the pilgrimage with tremendous vitality. For some people these events were intrinsically rewarding. Other people saw them as vehicles to remind the general public about Presley's importance and to firmly etch his place in history. This element of vitality enhanced the attractiveness of the locations in which they were held. For example, Bill Gore was an Elvis fan, and on 11 August 1984 Tupelo, Mississippi, attracted 2,500 people for a tribute to Presley's manager, Colonel Tom Parker (Commercial Appeal 12 August

1984, B2). Another important point was that the devout followers focused their attention on those things which Elvis considered to be important. The customized bus had been sold by Elvis. Therefore it did not generate very much interest. Somewhat similarly, because Presley adopted Memphis as his home Tupelo was of lesser importance both to him and his followers. Finally, the high rate of repeat visitations among the pilgrims suggested to me that they have manipulated their own destination to a large extent rather than having accepted prepackaged commercialism. For instance, the Elvis Country Fan Club chose to honor Elvis through the use of candles. The candlelight ceremony has escalated into a major event.

Consideration should now be given to the ongoing importance of the visit to Graceland.

#### Return Visitations

Some noteworthy findings were uncovered regarding repeat visits to Graceland. These pieces of information were very important to my research for two reasons. First, they accentuated the differences between pilgrims and tourists regarding the meaning of the Presley home. While the tourist was there for the first time, the typical pilgrim was an annual visitor. Second, the data indicated to me that an increased level of attention was placed on the mansion because of the singer's death. Although the immigrant pilgrims stated that they were destined to live in Memphis, they lacked the opportunity to move

there until Elvis's death because of familial, occupational or other commitments. In general, the immigrant pilgrims frequented the mansion during Presley's lifetime in the hopes of catching a glimpse of their hero. It should be noted that prior to Elvis's death some of his fans had migrated to Memphis. However, a security guard at the mansion stated that these people have since left the city. This suggested to me that Graceland lost much of its meaning for those fans when Presley died, and thus they had nothing to keep them in Memphis. It might be suggested that the people who moved to Memphis after the singer died did so because of their feelings of loss and missed opportunities. However, the immigrant pilgrims found the area in the vicinity of Graceland to be an exciting place which was filled with activity, and for some of them Elvis's spirit was very present. Recall that it was this continued inhabitation of Graceland by Presley which some of the immigrant pilgrims cherished, rather than the physical aspects of the house.

Transient pilgrims exhibited rather different travel patterns than those people who chose to live permanently in Memphis. Although only a limited number of transient pilgrims were visiting Graceland for the first time, approximately two thirds of this group had not visited the mansion during Presley's lifetime. The major reason for this occurrence was that the respondent lacked the opportunity to visit the singer's home while he was alive. A few other individuals were satisfied to see Presley perform in close proximity to where he or she resided. For most people who visited Graceland while Elvis

was still living, their primary objective was to get within a few feet of their hero, but for others, seeing his home was their goal. This information indicated two things to me. First, the emotionalism which surrounded his death prompted significant numbers of people to visit Graceland because they could extend their Presley experience to meaningful surroundings. Second, the mansion acquired greater meaning after the singer's demise because it was his treasured possession and an enduring physical remnant of his life. The pilgrimage has persisted because the pilgrim was fulfilled during his or her first visit and the experience was one that he or she wanted to recapture and develop.

While the transient pilgrims frequently visited Memphis and the immigrant pilgrims adopted that city as their home, the vast majority of general tourists had never been there before. A few tourists mentioned that they were in Memphis when Elvis was living there, but they did not know the location or have an interest at that time in seeing his house. The data suggested to me that the media stimulated interest among the tourists by bringing the mansion into national prominence at the time of the singer's funeral. There was also some information to suggest that the activities of the pilgrims generated curiosity amongst members of the general public. However, only a few of the tourists who were interviewed in mid August had prior knowledge about the festivities surrounding the anniversary of Presley's death.

Place of origin was an important factor which emerged from the



examination of return visitations to Graceland. The vast majority of people who visited Graceland during Presley's lifetime were residents of the American South East, the region in which the mansion is located. It was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that distance has remained a key variable in the present day. However, some noteworthy changes have taken place. The South West Region of the United States was particularly interesting because it accounted for a significant number of both pilgrims and tourists, and yet the only visitors from that region before Elvis died were two immigrant pilgrims. Similarly, none of the respondents from the United Kingdom and the Middle Atlantic Region had been to the Presley home during the singer's lifetime. However, since Presley's death these two points of origin have had notably higher rates of return visits to the mansion than other places. Very few people from the United Kingdom and the Middle Atlantic Region visited Graceland in 1984, but those who did go there tended to be repeat pilgrims. The data indicated to me that the devotees were more willing to sacrifice their time and money to journey to Memphis after Presley died because Graceland was a major part of his private life. Although Elvis's music career was preserved on phonographic records and movie films, it was his personal qualities which the vast majority of pilgrims most admired. After the devout followers journeyed to Memphis they found that their actual hardships were less than they had originally anticipated. Therefore a second visit was likely to be undertaken. More pilgrims hailed from regions which were in close proximity to

Graceland than those which were farther away because there were fewer hindrances for the former.

In short, the relative importance of Graceland increased as a result of Presley's death. While significant numbers of people gathered at its front gates before that time, their primary goal was to see Elvis. For some people Elvis has remained their basic motive for traveling to Memphis because they sensed his spiritual presence there. In contrast, the majority of pilgrims could have paid homage to him anywhere in the world. They returned to Memphis each year because of the meanings which they bestowed on the mansion, grave site and commemorative events. The meaning of place was based on the hero's importance. The satisfactions which people gained from participating in the various activities were largely a function of their general location. Tourists did not place as much significance on Elvis, and thus they did not usually return to Graceland. Presley's death made the general public more aware of Graceland and created a greater sense of need among the devotees to visit there on a repeat basis. Finally, because of their feelings of loss, they were more willing to traverse great distances to visit Graceland since Presley's death.

Now that we have considered several facets of the Memphis experience, let us look at it in its entirety.

### Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter it has been demonstrated that the significance of Elvis Presley, the places in his life and commemorative activities varied substantially among individuals. Variables such as age, sex and place of origin had little influence on the range of opinions. The typical pilgrim was a middle-aged female, but three of the people who had permanently migrated to Memphis because of the singer were males under the age of thirty. Regional variations were much less pronounced than the differences in opinion existing within a particular place of origin. The tourists and pilgrims varied from each other in terms of their attitudes and beliefs. There were also notable variations within each of the two groups. Because the pilgrims tended to view Presley as a human being, they placed great meaning on the physical remnants of his life. In contrast, the tourists were less aware of his personal life and placed comparatively little meaning on his home. Within the two groups of respondents, each individual had his or her own way of interpreting stimuli such as Presley and Graceland. The example was given of two immigrant pilgrims who held vastly different views about the singer's birthplace. On the surface these were two very similar people, and yet they had their own inner experience.

A number of linkages have been pointed out in the Presley-Memphis phenomenon. Elvis was the pillar on which everything else depended. The meaning of place was the next most important element.

There was a very strong positive relationship between these first two variables. If somebody had a deep interest in Elvis, then he or she not only placed meaning on Graceland and Meditation Gardens, but also on sites which were more remotely associated with him. True fans did not cherish everything equally. They focused their attention on those things which Presley held most dearly. The singer's death made more people aware of Graceland. Media coverage of his funeral informed the general public about where he lived. The pilgrims saw Graceland and Presley's only child, Lisa Marie, as the only things in life that he truly loved. Therefore they journeyed to the mansion because it was accessible. Next, people's experiences within a particular place were largely based on the meanings which they assigned to that environment. Although many of the tourists were saddened by Meditation Gardens, the depth of their experiences did not approximate those of the pilgrims. However, similar meanings bestowed upon a specific place did not preclude similar experiences between individuals. This was most pronounced at the mansion and grave site. The pilgrims had very different ideas about the commercialization of Graceland and the existence of Presley's spirit. Two more things hinged directly on the meaning of place. First, the events in which the pilgrims participated felt very special because they were held in Elvis's chosen city, Memphis. Second, they experienced strong feelings of comradeship with each other because they had gathered together in such a special city. The satisfactions which were derived from these events and social gatherings also

contributed to people's experiences in Memphis. Finally, the probability of a return visit was based on the rewards which were derived from the individual's original experiences in that place. The tourists tended to be passive observers in a sterile setting, whereas the pilgrims found a tremendous vitality in that same environment. While the tourists just wanted to see significant sites, the pilgrims wanted to perpetuate the memory of their hero. The pilgrims' efforts were unceasing for this reason.

No research exists in isolation. It builds upon previous investigations and theory. Let us next consider the overall significance of the present findings.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

In Chapters, III and IV we considered that the literature on hero worship, pilgrimages, and the meaning and experience of place may provide insights into the visit to Graceland. The chapter that followed presented my findings from five weeks of field work in Memphis. One task of the present chapter is to examine the similarities and differences between my data and the work of others. Consideration is then given to the possible future applications of my methods and findings. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

#### Findings Versus Literature

The highly variegated list of responses which I obtained through my interviews and surveys suggested to me that the Presley-Memphis phenomenon has its foundation in people's interpretations of stimuli. The meanings and attributes assigned to Elvis, Graceland, and related events and attractions, throughout the city of Memphis, were not uniform across or within groups of visitors. In general, most of the respondents viewed Graceland as a tourist attraction, whereas a significant minority has enshrined it.

The pilgrims in my study bestowed meanings upon Graceland and Meditation Gardens which closely parallel theoretical writings pertaining to sacred space. Tuan (1978a, 86-87) states that a sacred

object represents something greater than its material self, and this essence is not easily grasped by outsiders to the belief system. Furthermore, the literature indicates that sacred space is often perceived as the realm of the gods (Shephard 1967, 37; Tuan 1975a, 21-25; Tuan 1978a, 91). Similarly, Elvis Presley's house and grave were revered by a small minority of the pilgrims because they were seen as the dwelling places of his spirit or portals to his posthumous existence. The remaining pilgrims did not profess that Elvis has continued to inhabit his earthly abode. This assemblage of people cherished Graceland, in particular, because it was there that they could gain insights into the intricate human aspects of their hero's life. Likewise, Klapp (1948, 54-59) and Sumption (1975, 94, 135) state that the members of a movement realize that their founder was real when they visit significant sites mentioned in his or her biography. Finally, the tourists in my study did not place the same value on Graceland as the pilgrims did, nor were their experiences as intense.

Eliade (1957, 24) professes that special places in the life of every individual are sacred because they provide an anchorage for reality. In a similar manner, Lynch (1972, 44) states that people like to visit the homes of their recent predecessors because those places enhance personal understanding. Elvis Presley was an integral part of the pilgrims' lives. He was their hero and role model. The singer has had a marked influence on these people, even after his death. This was particularly true of the immigrant

pilgrims. Because these individuals made a permanent move to Memphis and sought employment in the vicinity of Graceland, these facts strongly suggested that Presley was the central focus in their lives. Elvis was also very important to the transient pilgrims, but they tended to be rooted in their own homes because of occupational and familial commitments. However, the importance of Graceland to these people should not be understated. The conversations which I had with these people indicated that they needed to be in Memphis on the anniversary of the singer's death. By perpetuating his memory they were also retaining a vital part of their personal identities.

Camaraderie was an important facet of the pilgrims' collective experience. As stated earlier, the literature shows that individuals who initially join social movements are lonely and in need of other people from whom they can derive meaning in their lives (Turner and Killian 1972, 362). This was particularly evident among those people who viewed Elvis as their surrogate partner, and felt his spiritual presence in close proximity to Graceland. Next, the profound tendency of the pilgrims to congregate in Memphis during Elvis International Tribute Week indicated the importance of being with similar others.

If social opportunities were not a significant aspect of the pilgrimage, then one must question why comparatively little of the pilgrims' time was spent at Graceland. The pilgrims longed to be in Memphis because Presley loved Graceland more than any other place in the world, and was buried in Meditation Gardens. Once they were



gathered together in this meaningful place, the pilgrims saw the opportunity to perpetuate Elvis's memory by organizing tributes, as well as creating a familial atmosphere among themselves. Similarly, Barber (1972, 328) states that when people congregate at a war memorial, common ideals are strengthened because there are enough people to propagate these notions.

Hammontree (1979, 59) states that some of Elvis Presley's fans continue to live vicariously through the dead singer. During my field research, I observed only a few people who imitated Elvis's style of dress and mannerisms. However, the desire of the vast majority of the pilgrims to be with similar others and to propel their hero's image suggested to me that a strong need existed among them to be associated with something of greater importance than themselves. As previously stated, the pilgrims not only reveled in their hero's past accomplishments, they exuded pride in their own role in perpetuating his memory for the benefit of future generations. Because Presley's image was seen as lasting, they may have consciously or unconsciously found anchorage in a world plagued by actual and potential change, as through nuclear warfare, urban violence and family upheaval. Even if they were contented with their own lives, the pilgrims may have seen the opportunity to transcend their own mortality by becoming a part of the Presley mystique through the pilgrimage.

Rolph (1976b, 31) states that rituals, customs and myths enjoin the members of a group with their surroundings. I found that the

events commemorating the Presley persona gained much of their significance from their general location. To venerate Elvis in the city in which he spent most of his lifetime was very important to his devout followers. It was there that they felt closest to him, and could enjoin with others who had similar attitudes toward the singer. However, the attractiveness of places like Humes High School was enhanced because of the events which were held there. In other words, the pilgrims were able to keep their hero's memory alive by adding vitality to the places connected with his life. Finally, devoted Presley fans assigned special meaning to these locations because of the images they held about the singer. They recognized qualities in him which the tourists did not perceive quite as readily.

Tuan (1974, 98, 108) states that people cannot establish meaningful relationships with their physical surroundings without long-term residency and working with the land. Durkheim (1975, 131) and Tanaka (1977, 113) profess that sacredness is an assigned status, which is maintained through continued usage. The pilgrims in my study were in Memphis to express the value they placed on Graceland, Meditation Gardens and other notable sites in the life of their hero. These places did not acquire meaning through frequent visits by individual pilgrims. They were already meaningful places. True devotees put Elvis in a prominent position in their lives. Being an Elvis fan was an important part of their identity. When the physical side of Presley died, his devoted followers accentuated his humanitarianism and the material remnants of his earthly existence.

Because they were touched by his presence in life and by his death, the pilgrims had a profound need to visit his home and grave. The literature on pilgrimages substantiates this finding because it states that people can have a tremendous attachment to sacred lands, which they may have never visited. This suggested to me that commitment to a specific cause, rather than residency, is the underlying determiner of the meanings which are assigned to our surroundings. That is, the values that we assign to our family members, heroes, political systems or religions may enjoin us with certain localities.

An unresolved issue in both scholarly and judicial circles is the extent to which the mass media can influence human behavior. Sann (1967, 317) claims that the public's overwhelming response to the death of Rudolph Valentino resulted from an intense publicity program. In contrast, Moeller (1979, 43) states that the media probably does not generate new trends, but rather takes notice of existing activities. Significant numbers of people visited Graceland during Presley's lifetime. However, widespread media attention to this occurrence did not take place until the emotionalism surrounding Elvis's death. Although the vast majority of today's pilgrims had not been in Memphis prior to Presley's demise, there was insufficient evidence to suggest that the present meanings of that place were stimulated by the media. The pilgrimage was an act of love. If the media did have an effect on the pilgrims' perceptions, then it was at a much earlier stage in their Presley experience. The tourists were

less familiar with Elvis's personal life. In general, they did not know about Graceland until it started appearing in the news.

Aquila (1982) and Tharpe (1979, 7) state that deceased celebrities are remembered by the public because of the publicity that they receive after their deaths. Similarly, the pilgrims in my study recognized the media's ability to introduce their hero to new generations. Many of them mentioned that they have frequently contacted their local radio and television stations because they wanted to keep Elvis in the forefront. Because the media was often cynical toward him, their activities were geared to accentuate his outstanding qualities to quell these negative portrayals. Throughout my research, I encountered devoted Presley fans who only really became aware of the singer after his death because they were too young to recall his heyday. Therefore, it is very feasible that Elvis and Graceland will be revered for many years after today's pilgrims have grown old and died. In contrast, Rudolph Valentino's appeal to young audiences dwindled forty years after his death because of changing interests and technologies (Shulman 1967, 497). Elvis Presley will continue to attract new audiences because there is continuity within the popular music trends of the past three decades (Marsh 1984). That is, many of today's youth initially become interested in older recording artists such as Presley when they are exploring the roots of their own generation's music. I propose that an individual who grows to love Elvis at some future date will also assign special meaning to Graceland because he or she will be exposed

to information which states that other devotees have made the pilgrimage a pinnacle of their subculture. Relph (1976b, 58) states that the media can influence the meaning of certain environments. Under the circumstances which I have described, I would tend to agree with that statement.

Cultural background is also a determiner in how people interpret their surroundings (Tuan 1974, 45-46). My findings did not entirely support this postulation. Respondents from the same place of origin varied from each other in terms of the meanings which they assigned to Presley related stimuli. Furthermore, devout and indifferent visitors came from all over the world. The proportion of pilgrims from a particular region tended to increase with distance, whereas the total number of visitors decreased. The pilgrims were much more willing to sacrifice their time and money to visit Memphis. Therefore, the most significant differences existed between the pilgrims and the tourists. The experiences of the pilgrims were much more intense because they have allowed Elvis to play a much more influential role in their lives. However, the expectations which people had about the Presley mansion's physical makeup were at least partially influenced by their frame of reference. Nevertheless, the pilgrim's preconceived notions were generally more vivid because of their greater interest in Elvis's life.

Pfaffenberger (1983) states that tourists and pilgrims seek very different experiences. In contrast, Turner and Turner (1978, 20-23) state that pilgrims and tourists have marked similarities. In my

study, there was a continuum of attitudes towards Elvis Presley. The respondents at the highest end of the scale, the pilgrims, were in Memphis to perpetuate the Presley mystique, make friends, have fun and shed a tear. In other words, they sought vitality in their experiences. The tourists did not express a desire to become actively involved with their surroundings. They did not bring flowers to the grave site nor did they participate in commemorative ceremonies. The tourists tended to view the Presley mansion as an artifact of recent history, whereas the pilgrims incorporated it into their lives.

Lynch (1960) suggests that people falling within the same age, sex or socioeconomic category tend to have similar perspectives, but individuals do vary from one another within these parameters. The devout followers of Elvis Presley tended to be members of the working class, but their group also consisted of business and professional people. The tourists had a similar profile. The range of experiences within each assemblage of visitors transcended occupational groupings. Furthermore, members of the same family, who shared the fruits of their joint efforts, did not necessarily place the same value on their visit to Memphis. Next, Graceland's visitors were typically middle-aged, but attitudes towards Presley and his mansion varied tremendously within each age group. For instance, there was a thirty year age gap between the youngest and oldest immigrant pilgrims. Small children generally appeared to be disinterested in the mansion, but I did come across a few families in

which the youngest offspring instigated their visit. Finally, the range of meanings and experiences, which were expressed by the respondents, did not vary by sex. Although the female pilgrims greatly outnumbered their male counterparts, I did not find evidence to suggest that experiences were based on gender.

The literature indicates that the most notable variations in perceptions occur among individuals within any given group (Bachelard 1964, 72; Donovan 1979, 1; Relph 1976a, 24; Rowles 1978a, 160). Similarly, I found this to be true in the case of the Presley-Memphis phenomenon. The pilgrims were a subculture because they were devoted to keeping Elvis in the forefront, and viewed themselves as a family unit. However, their experiences in Memphis and the specific meanings which they assigned to the commemorative events varied from person to person. They did not have formal doctrines to guide them in their beliefs. In Christian theology, an underlying principle is that Jesus rose from the dead and will live forever. In contrast, Presley's followers did not agree that their hero has remained a living entity. Each pilgrim loved Elvis in a unique way. Therefore, when he or she arrived in Memphis for the first time, his or her experiences in that environment were also matchless. In other words, the pilgrims were a body of individuals. Nevertheless, they were able to view themselves as a family because they were equally devoted to Presley. Likewise, the tourists responded to Presley and related attractions in a variety of ways. It was evident that the tourists' presence accentuated the pilgrims' sense of group identity.

The pilgrims perceived the tourists as outsiders because they lacked commitment to Presley.

Next, Rowles (1978a, 174) and Tuan (1974, 153) state that the meaning of a particular place may vary from context to context. Similarly, [redacted] found that the significance of Graceland changed over time. During Elvis's lifetime, the mansion's visitors generally arrived with the hope that they would get to see the singer in his home environment. The home did not have as much meaning as it does today because devotees had the opportunity to see him perform live in concert. At the moment of his death, the mansion emerged as the prime symbol of their loyalty and a host of other emotions. Although the mansion is meaningful throughout the year, it garners additional significance when the pilgrims are able to congregate in large numbers. Similarly, Steele (1981, 70) states that the character of a setting is influenced by the kinds of people who are present.

Allen (1976, 56) and Renwick and Cutter (1983, 30) state that visitors to any destination arrive with preconceived notions of that place, which are not readily abandoned when further information is made available. My findings did not conform to this theory. Relatively few visitors to Graceland found what they expected. Nevertheless, the importance of Graceland did not change because the structure was more elaborate or smaller than the respondent had expected. The meaning of Graceland was founded in his or her interpretations of Elvis Presley.

Throughout this paper I have stressed that the meanings and



experiences associated with the heroic figure were dependent on the assigned significance of that person. Several theorists including Davies (1969, 273), Klapp (1949, 139) and Pratt (1979, 43) argue that heroes require both media exposure and exceptional qualities for them to achieve recognition. Alternately, Kenan (1983, 53), Lawson (1969, 174), Morrow (1983, 61) and Rollin (1970, 435) state that the actual deeds and attributes of heroes are of lesser consequence than the perceptions which other people have of them. Elvis Presley's associates stated that he was an extraordinary human being. However, it seemed to me that the latter argument was more applicable to the present study. With the exception of a relative few Elvis fans who had the opportunity to actually meet their hero, the general public only knew him through media and stage presentations, and possibly by talking about him with his friends and relatives. From these limited pieces of information, some people became enamored of Presley while others were relatively unmoved. Devotees were not only well acquainted with the details of his life, the vast majority of them also had a strong sense that they knew him personally. In general, he was much much more than a celebrity to his followers. Presley was seen as an electrifying performer, and yet he exuded admirable human traits. Graceland was sacred space because the pilgrims had this special bond with its owner.

Ralph's ideas on the meaning of place received special attention earlier and may now be reconsidered in light of the material that I gathered on my journey to Memphis.

3

He argues that people's involvement with places are much too complex to approach using formal quantitative measures. Furthermore, generalities often hide fundamental differences among individuals and among groups (Relph 1976b, 6; 1981b, 30-174; 1984, 211-12). I agree with this line of reasoning because the Memphis experience for the transient and immigrant pilgrims was much more heartfelt, profound and diverse than I had originally anticipated. Had I employed a tool such as bipolar adjective scales rather than open-ended questions, I would have obtained only superficial information. Also, many of the pilgrims would not have accepted a more formal questionnaire than the one that I used, because they believed that their feelings for Presley were immeasurable.

Place, according to Relph (1976b, 43), is the center of one's identity as an individual or group member. I have mentioned throughout this paper that one of Graceland's allurements to devoted Presley followers was they could feel close to their hero while they were there. The city of Memphis also contained a multitude of stories about the late singer because he resided there since he was thirteen years of age until his death at the age of forty-two. Also because Presley and Graceland's identities were intertwined, and because Elvis was an important part of the pilgrims' lives, it becomes clear why Graceland has assumed such a prominent role.

Relph indicates that there are various levels of involvement that people can have with places. Likewise, the meanings which were assigned to Graceland were highly polarized. Nevertheless, my

findings do not fit neatly into Relph's categories. The immigrant pilgrims certainly experienced "existential insideness" because they felt that they belonged in Memphis since they perceived it as the center of the world. They did not seem to have any reason to remain in their former residences. Transient pilgrims were also actively involved in the Memphis environment. By definition, they did not experience "existential insideness" because most of them also had tight bonds with their home environments. Being an Elvis fan was an integral part of their personal identities. Thus, it seems to me that people can orient themselves, as to who they are, from more than one point of reference. The tourists also pose a problem in terms of Relph's schema. With the exception of a few individuals, they liked Elvis Presley and were curious about Graceland, and thus experienced more than "behavioral insideness". That is, they did not see themselves as being just anywhere. However, the tourists did not experience "empathetic insideness"; they did not seem to have a heartfelt appreciation of the home's continuing importance to the pilgrims, and they were not deeply moved by their surroundings. Finally, it could be argued that Graceland's visitors knew beforehand what their experiences at that place would be like from what they had read. This may be true, but there was a tremendous variation in experiences even among the devotees. The pilgrims had a knowingness about Elvis and his home which transcended anything they could have read (Relph 1976b, 51-55).

Did Presley's followers establish real roots in Memphis? Based

on Relph's definition this would necessitate familiarity, respect and commitment to that environment (Relph 1976b, 37). My findings support his criteria for roots. As noted earlier, the pilgrims staged numerous events throughout the city to memorialize their hero and to aid local charities. A few of them were also observed removing litter from the area surrounding the singer's grave, as well as aiding yardmen in rearranging floral displays. The pilgrims also felt a special kinship with one another when they gathered together. They played an integral role in the Elvis - Memphis saga.

Relph (1976b, 38) indicates that roots are strongest when one has a wide variety of experiences within a place. The pilgrims experienced both joy and sorrow while they were in Memphis, whereas uncommitted tourists found those same surroundings to be sterile.

Images of place vary most notably among individuals because imaginations, experiences, intentions, emotions and present situations are unique to each person (Relph 1976b, 56-57). My data suggested that this was true of the Memphis situation. Graceland, Meditation Gardens and other Presley - related sites were what people intended them to be. Elvis's ghost made itself known in a variety of forms and places to some of those people who felt that Presley was their friend. Other devotees who had similar feelings toward the singer did not report spiritual encounters. Profound differences also existed among members of the same family and among people from the same region. Finally, it seemed to me that personal needs were a strong indicator of Graceland's importance. That is, the immigrant

pilgrims were in need of a family environment.

Some common images exist among people who share the same values (Relph 1976b, 58). The pilgrims were unified in their beliefs that their hero was deeply religious; they shaped their Memphis environment in keeping with those notions. Graceland was accepted as the primary focus of the pilgrimage, but places like Tupelo were assigned varying levels of importance by the devotees. To me it seemed that they constituted too large a group, and they were not together for long enough periods of time to establish a formal system of beliefs.

Finally, Relph cautions that a mounting problem in today's society is "placelessness." Places may not be assigned unique identities because mass culture propagates sameness. Housing facilities and entertainment complexes are identical from one community to the next (Relph 1976b, 92, 143). The Presley-Memphis environment was unique. As an illustration, Days Inn was probably no different from a structural standpoint, still, it was a hub of the Elvis-Memphis community. Presley was a media personality, but the meanings assigned to him and his mansion by his fans were very personal. Because there was only one Elvis Presley and only one Graceland mansion, it seemed likely that people sought them out as havens from a world which has begun to devalue human labour in favour of technological advancements.

I agree generally with Relph's postulations. The meaning and experience of place are indeed complex issues, and it is for this

reason that I approached them through qualitative means. We both see that there are varying levels of involvement with places; there are profound differences in how individuals view the world; certain images are shared among group members; and modern society is not necessarily conducive to personal development. However, I feel that the real world is structured less rigidly than Relph seems to imply.

In summary, my findings substantiated some portions of the existing literature, and raised questions about other parts. First, the collective experience of Presley's followers in Memphis was not unique to that personage or location. Throughout history, mankind has felt a special closeness to venerated individuals in sacred places. Although technological advancements have dramatically altered human environments, people have not really changed over the centuries. They still need to find something greater than themselves. Second, I found evidence to support the notion that comradeship is a strong inducement to join social movements. Third, the literature states that people can live vicariously through heroic figures. My data indicated to me that followers can maintain these satisfactions after their hero has died if they actively propagate his or her memory. Next, devout Elvis fans were not enjoined with places in the singer's life by way of rituals, customs or long-term residency. Instead, their sense of loss at the time of his death led them to cling onto his beloved mansion. The events which were held during Elvis International Tribute Week gained their significance

from their location. Because these activities served to perpetuate the image of Elvis Presley, they also maintained the meaning of Graceland and other Memphis attractions. Fifth, the mass media did not have a direct influence on the meanings which were bestowed upon the Presley mansion. It simply provided people with information. Furthermore, the pilgrims wanted to sway the direction of future commentaries about Elvis so that newer generations would not have a tainted view of him. Sixth, I did not find enough evidence to support the literature which states that variables such as age, sex, occupation, income and culture influence one's experiences. The most significant differences were found within each of the aforementioned groups. Seventh, my findings supported the theory that pilgrims and tourists seek different experiences. In general, my respondents were interested in Presley, but their perceptions were highly variegated. Furthermore, each visitor's experiences were in some way different than those of other people. Similar postulations are made in the literature which deals with perception. Meanings are not innate. They are assigned. Next, my study demonstrated that the meaning of a particular place may vary over time. Finally, I found evidence to refute the theory that people are reluctant to abandon their erroneous preconceptions.

The next section considers aspects of the present research which require further study.

### Future Study

Two avenues of future research are indicated by the present investigation. First, alterations could be made to my procedure. Second, places which are associated with other heroic figures also need to be considered in terms of the meanings and experiences which they invoke.

I found my procedure to be very effective because it enabled the respondents to speak freely about their thoughts and emotions. I did encounter some technical difficulties, but those can be easily remedied under a more ideal set of circumstances.

With the exception of the immigrant pilgrims, devotees were in Memphis for a relatively short duration. Because I wanted to speak to as many people as possible during that week, I did not have the opportunity to maintain contacts with the vast majority of them. Casual conversations with former subjects were very informative because there was a heightened sense of familiarity between us. "We...cannot know what a place is like in a vacuum, independent of the people who will experience it" (Steele 1981, ix).

The Memphis experience could be much better understood by compiling detailed profiles of each of the respondents. What are his or her other interests? How sound are his or her relationships with family members, and friends? We might begin to see, for instance, why fewer doctors than housewives have strong attachments to Graceland.



A longitudinal study would provide additional benefits because a representative sample of pilgrims could be traced over several return visits to Memphis. The researcher would be able to probe much deeper into their experiences, and accompany them to various sites and events. The respondents would also have time to explore the complexities of their own experiences. There was evidence to suggest that at least some of the pilgrims had never previously considered why they were attracted to Presley and Graceland. An additional asset of an ongoing study is that the researcher could see if experiences are heightened during special anniversaries.

Another improvement would be the hiring of a second researcher to aid in the analyses. Hopefully, this move would provide additional assurances that an accurate portrayal is produced. At times, I found that it was very difficult to be sympathetic toward the feelings of one group without adopting their attitudes toward the other visitors.

The value of the present investigation is not limited to the study of Elvis Presley and key locations in his life. It examines the range of meanings and experiences which are associated with special persons and places. Furthermore, it focuses on the attitudes of laymen toward their surroundings. As indicated in Chapter I, there is a paucity of this kind of research. The literature on sense of place tends to be theoretical, and when actual settings are considered, it reflects the elitist views of authors like Farley Mowat. Hopefully, the present study will find its place with works

such as Rowles's study of the geography of elderly people.

There are numerous other cases which are probably very similar to the Memphis scene. Another American hero also died in Memphis. Civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in 1968. A future study could compare this site with Graceland, as well as draw similarities between King and Presley. A second project might consider the shooting massacre on 19 July 1984 at the McDonald's Restaurant in San Ysidro, California. Follow-up news coverage of the event disclosed that the fast-food outlet was demolished because of pressure from the local community, and a small shrine was erected at the site by families of the victims. Furthermore, the restaurant's new location was reported to elicit very intense emotional responses from some people. A third possibility is Heritage U.S.A., a Christian resort in Charlotte, North Carolina. Personal sources indicate that its meeting houses, campgrounds, luxury hotels, permanent residences and recreational facilities were built during the early 1980s to glorify God, and to enable people who are born-again to have fellowship with one another.

In short, future studies should probe deeper into the Memphis experience, or consider other cases in which a particular place prompts emotional reactions from people because it is associated with a significant individual or event.

## Conclusions

How accurate were my original assumptions, and what hypotheses evolved from the data set? To emphasize the scope of my findings, I will move away from the Presley case and speak in general terms.

Recall that four assumptions formed the foundation of the present study. In general, these were validated by the various pieces of information which I collected in the field. The first assumption was that the pilgrimage was the ultimate form of paying homage to the dead hero. However, I found that visiting a famous place did not necessarily constitute a pilgrimage. The significance of the journey to the individual participant was dependent upon his or her interpretations of the heroic figure. Another assumption was that followers gained status among their fellows by coming in contact with physical remnants of the hero's life. Because the venerated person in my case study was dead, I reasoned that his home and grave served as surrogates for a truly authentic experience. The pilgrims did feel very close to him in those places. To some of them, the mansion and grave were not substitutes because they actually experienced their hero's ghost during their visit. I did not find evidence to support the notion that the pilgrimage generated prestige in the manner that I originally surmised. Devotees gained intrinsic rewards from their efforts to propagate their hero's image. The journey was not valued as a status symbol because the destination was accessible to anybody with sufficient funds. Finally, my third and

fourth assumptions were quite accurate. Rituals and comradeship were very important aspects of the pilgrimage.

The data suggests several additional ideas. First, the meaning of place is accentuated by a notable event such as the death of the heroic figure. Second, followers emphasize those places which were meaningful to their hero. Furthermore, the meaning of a particular location is a function of the temporal distance which separates it from the venerated person. Third, the meaning of place varies from context to context. For instance, special activities can enhance the meaning of a relatively marginal location. Fourth, commemorative activities gain significance when they are held in the hero's home community. Devotees feel very close to the person of distinction in that locality, and thus their efforts gain a certain mystique. Next, the expectations which travelers have of their destination's aesthetic qualities are not related to the meanings which they may assign to that place. Likewise, people do not maintain their preconceptions when these notions do not concur with actual elements in the environment. Finally, perceptions and experiences are unique to each individual. When similarities do occur, these do not appear to be strongly related to variables such as age, sex and place of origin. In general, one's perceptions of the heroic figure influence the meaning of place, and in turn the assigned significance of a location has an effect on environmental experiences.

In conclusion, the pilgrimage in popular culture is not a passing fad. Throughout the history of mankind, people have bestowed

special status upon some individuals and places. Like medieval saints, contemporary figures such as Elvis Presley fulfill the needs of their followers. Holy men were attributed with healing powers by their adherents because the latter often suffered from infirmities which were incurable by existing medical technology. Today, people look to their heroes for excitement or an escape from the perils of broken homes or unemployment. Heroes also provide a sense of permanence in a rapidly changing world. When they die, the places which they traversed in life emerge as symbols of their lastingness. Further study is needed because the pilgrimage contains a wealth of information about the human condition.

APPENDIX I

MAILING TO FAN CLUB ORGANIZERS

4March 6, 1984

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a graduate student in Geography at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada. Currently, I am preparing a paper on the pilgrimage of Elvis Presley fans to Memphis, Tennessee. Specifically, I am interested in how the desire to visit Graceland varies for Elvis fans from place to place. This topic is particularly interesting to me because I have long been an Elvis fan and am a member of the Elvis in Canada Fan Club. I would very much appreciate answers to the following questions as they are vital to my research. 1) How does your fan club regard Elvis Presley, and has this changed in any way since Elvis's death? 2) To what extent is Memphis a desired point of destination among your members? 3) How can you account for the large number of Elvis fans visiting Graceland each year? 4) In relation to playing Elvis records or watching video tapes of Elvis, how would your members rank a visit to Graceland, and how has this changed over time?

Thank you very much for the time you will spend in answering these questions. It will be interesting to see how your answers compare with those from other fan clubs throughout the world.

Sincerely,

James Davidson  
Graduate Student  
Department of Geography  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Waterloo, Ontario  
Canada, N2L 3C5

APPENDIX II  
SURVEY OF FAN CLUB MEMBERS



PARTICIPATE IN AN ELVIS SURVEY: James Davidson of Kitchener, Ontario is completing his M.A. at University, with a thesis that involves the travel to Memphis by Elvis fans. You can assist him by answering the following questions.

1. What does Elvis mean to you?
2. Have you been to Memphis?
3. If so, what does that mean to you?

Please send your responses (regardless of length) addressed to Jim, at the Fan Club address. We will forward them, unopened, to him.  
Thanks.

APPENDIX III

NIAGARA FALLS PILOT STUDY

1. Would you mind telling me where your home is? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the principal reasons for your trip? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Where are you going on this trip? Is Niagara Falls your  
principle destination? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What activities have you engaged in or intend to engage in during  
your stay in Niagara Falls? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever been to Niagara Falls before? Have you visited the  
Elvis Museum before? For what length of time will you be staying  
in Niagara Falls? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. If a friend of your's asked you to describe the Elvis Museum what  
would you tell him or her? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Can you tell me how you felt when you saw (particular displays)  
in the museum? \_\_\_\_\_
8. If you were asked to describe Elvis to somebody from another  
planet who had no prior knowledge of the singer, what would be  
your response? (Can you expand on that?) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you have a personal interest in Elvis Presley, such as  
collecting records? When did you become interested in Elvis?  
Did you ever see Elvis in person? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What kind of work do you do? That is, what is your job title?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Description of respondent:

APPENDIX IV  
MEMPHIS SURVEY

1. Would you mind telling me where your home is? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are your reasons for being in Memphis? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long will you have been in Memphis when you leave? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which sites and events have you seen or plant to see during your stay in Memphis? Have you toured through Elvis's house/private jet/tour bus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you tell me what your thoughts and feelings were inside the house/bus/jet and at the grave? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Does Graceland have any particular meaning for you? (Can you expand on that?) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you visited Memphis before? Why? Did you ever consider visiting Memphis when Elvis was alive? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What does Elvis mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. To what extend were your expectations of the house/jet/bus met in reality? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you plan to visit Elvis's birthplace in Tupelo, Mississippi/Sun Studio/Overton Park? Do these places have any meaning for you? Why did you visit/place greater meaning on Graceland than Tupelo? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Description of respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX V

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS POSED TO IMMIGRANT PILGRIMS

1. Why did you move to Memphis? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did you expect your life would be like in Memphis? Have these expectations been met? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How do you enjoy living in Memphis? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. For what length of time have you been living here? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. At what point did you decide to move to Memphis? Why didn't you move here during Elvis's lifetime? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What do you do with your time? How frequently do you visit sites around Memphis related to Elvis? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the attraction of Graceland for you -- considering that Elvis is dead? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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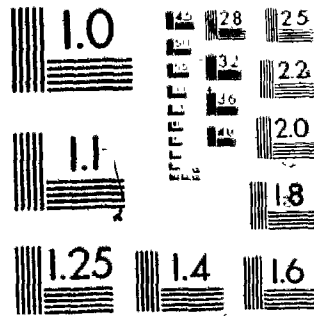
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